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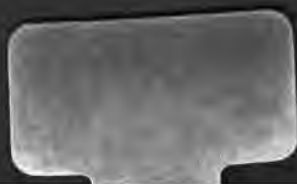
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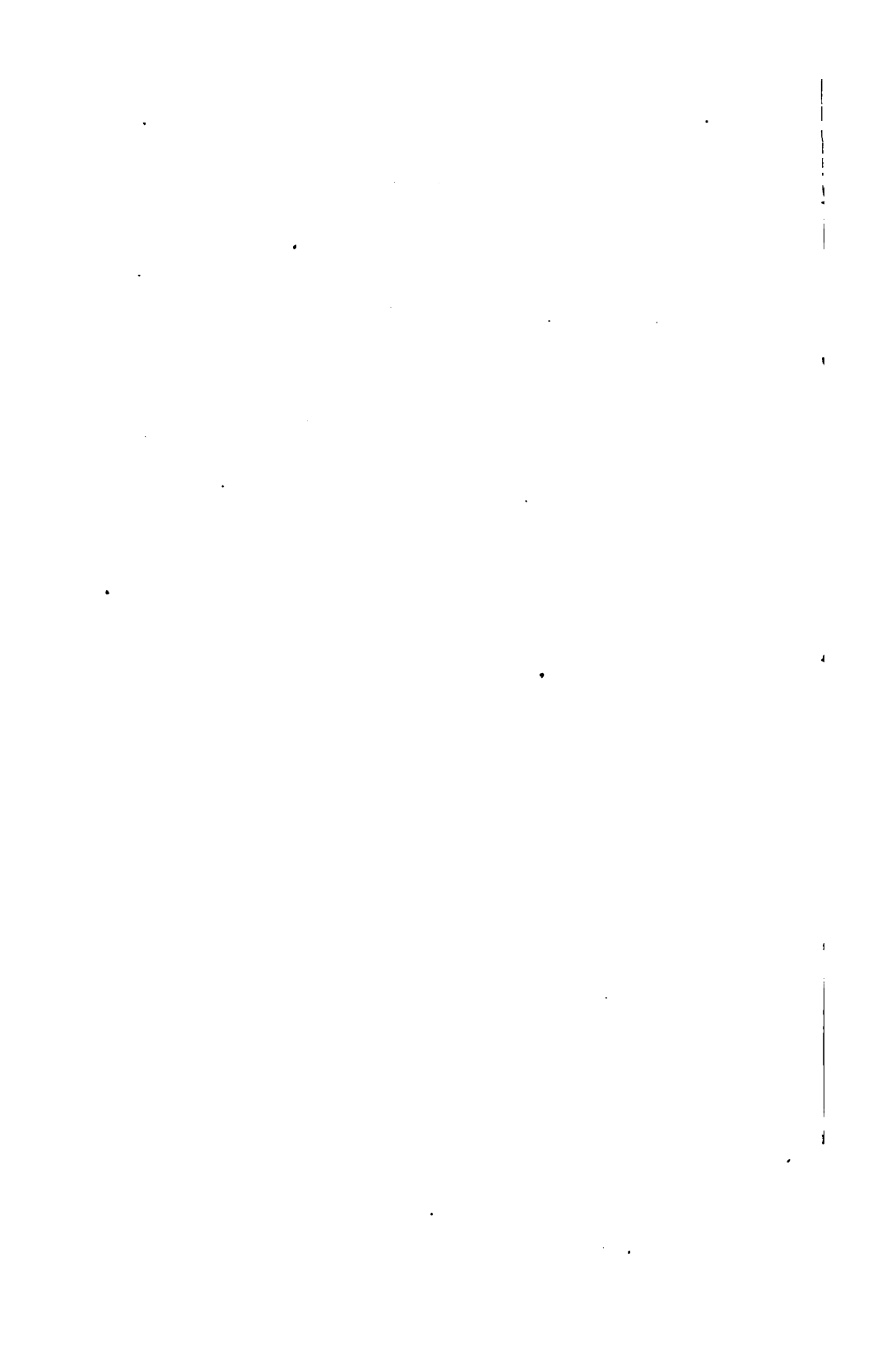
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A HOME LIFE.

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THE JOURNAL
OF
A HOME LIFE.

BY
ELIZABETH M. SEWELL

AUTHOR OF
'AMY HERBERT' 'LANETON PARSONAGE' 'A GLIMPSE OF THE WORLD' ETC.

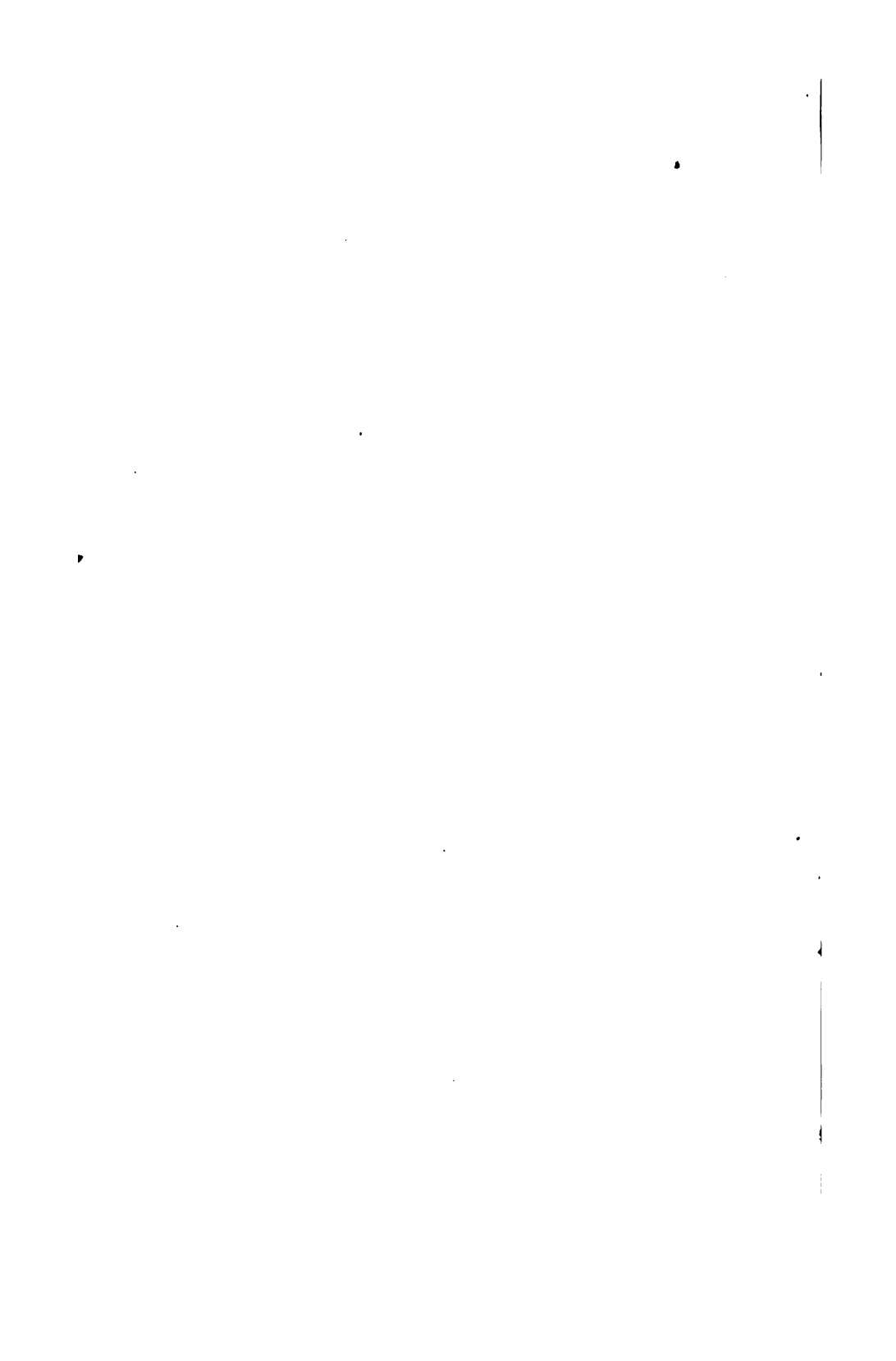
L'homme propose, mais Dieu dispose.



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PREFACE.

THE following Tale was written with the wish to illustrate not only a few fundamental principles of Education, but also the difficulties and disappointments attendant upon the endeavour to carry them out under ordinary circumstances, and amongst ordinary people.

Any attempt to describe an education which should be perfect in theory and entirely successful in practice, would be necessarily a failure.

For that which it is evident God requires of us is, to work for Him,—solely to please Him,—without depending for our stimulus upon results. He puts into our hands certain instruments, and by the events of life imposes upon us certain conditions, which, in themselves, involve imperfection. With these we are to do our best, and, whatever that best may be,—however fraught with failure in its more immediate earthly object,—it is stored in the Treasure House of God, and the Day will come when it will be approved in the sight of angels and of saints.

Then, and not till then, shall we know the Great End

which our mistakes and disappointments, as well as our successes, have been permitted to further.

And meanwhile, looking forward to that wondrous revelation of God's hidden Will, we may, surely without irreverence, find support in the words of our Redeemer: —‘ What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter.’

ASHCLIFF, BONCHURCH:

Feb. 28th, 1867.

THE JOURNAL
OF
A HOME LIFE.

CHAPTER I.

London, May 8, 18 . . Years ago I laughed at the idea of keeping a journal. I thought it young-ladyish. I fancied it must be a mere record of sentimentalities, or of uninteresting petty events. I think differently now : life has been so strange, I often wish I had noted down things as they happened ; and I should like also to be able to recall the impression they made upon me. Characters and opinions are formed by means of so many influences, that it is difficult, after a time, to discover why or how one has attained to a particular conviction. It is peculiarly so in my case. I do not think I know much about myself : I could not say how I have arrived at being what I am ; and, indeed, I could scarcely give a description of my own character. I only know that I seem to be always in a process of formation ; always, as it were, receiving into and amalgamating with myself the residuum of the moral experiments which I am unconsciously making. Perhaps in earlier years, if I had kept a journal, I should have been tempted to watch this involuntary moral chemistry. It would have been foolish—bad for me : so far, I am glad that I did not do it. As to writing the results, it would

have been almost impossible for another reason. I could not have done it under my husband's eye; and, for my own sake, I could not have ventured to do it apart from him. It would have been a revelation to myself as much as to him. I see this now, and I can bear to acknowledge it; but I could not have done so then. It would have tempted me to put into shape the vague, often quiescent, misgivings, which for both our sakes were far better crushed. He loved me as much as, under the circumstances, he could love anything. I think also—I pray God I may not deceive myself—that I gave him all the honour and duty which a wife can give, and he was satisfied. I ask myself sometimes whose fault it was that I married without a warmer feeling? whether it was any person's? My parents were deceived by my acceptance of the offer. I was deceived so far, that I thought the esteem in which I held my future husband would ripen into love; and I had had my romance, and been disappointed. I could not find what I had once dreamt of, and therefore I strove to content myself with a reality which I was told was worthy of my affection. And my disappointment in my romance had not been what is commonly called a disappointment in love. I had not given my heart and been rejected, for I knew from the very first that my feeling was not returned, and I did not expect or even wish it to be so. My ideal was so much older, so far above me in every way; he treated me as a child; and I was a child, and acknowledged it. But his presence was happiness, his absence dreariness. I was conscious when he was in the room, even when I did not see him. His least word was treasured by me; his passing caress gave me a thrill of delight. I could have sat by his side for hours, watching him when he was weary, waiting upon him, forestalling his wishes; and when, at times, he let me open my heart to him, the bliss of gaining his attention,

and knowing that I excited his interest, was absolutely without alloy. He led me upwards also; he made religion what it has ever since been to me—beautiful, poetical, even because it was so real. He taught me the luxury of self-discipline, the sense of stability which comes with the consciousness of holding self in a firm grasp; and yet he guarded me from self-confidence by leading me to seek for my strength in God; and last, perhaps best—boon of all, he disenchanted me! I use the words with no bitterness, but rather with a solemn earnestness. Little as I know of myself, thus much I am certain of, that I should never have loved as I could love, without idolatry. There are natures which can find their rest in equality. It is not so with me. To love fully I must love with a perfect reverence; and with this there must always be a danger of absorption in a human feeling. Therefore I am grateful—not to him, but to God, who so early crushed me, and by the very keenness of my disappointment, won, as I trust, my heart to Himself. Yet at the time it was a very grievous trial; no one around me in the least guessed how grievous. When Mr. Mordaunt, instead of marrying a woman worthy of him, sold himself for rank and political influence, people laughed, and said he was ambitious, but no one seemed to think the less of him; they declared, indeed, that it was just like him, that every one was aware he was ambitious; and then they amused themselves with me, because I was unhappy: they said I was jealous, and that it was childish nonsense. No one understood what I meant when I asked, whether all good men were ambitious. The only reply I received was, ‘if they are not ambitious, they are something else; men are human beings; of course they are imperfect.’ And then began a discussion as to the indications of ambition which the man I honoured above all others had shown. His character was taken to pieces, and dissected before me. One said he was selfish;

another thought there was a taint of vanity in him; a third had always felt that he was unpractical. And I could not contradict them. There was the one glaring fact staring me in the face. He had talked to me again and again of what the woman must be whom he could marry; he had especially insisted upon the necessity of religious earnestness, simplicity, truthfulness, refinement; he had made me feel that she must be so far superior to myself, that I could scarcely hope even to be admitted to her friendship; and yet he had thrown himself away upon the noisiest flirt in London, a woman who had not even the attraction of beauty; and why? The only answer I could give was—the world's. She was the sister of a man of very great influence, and the connection would advance him in his political career.

I tried not to think it; I gave myself lectures upon harsh judgment; I actually closed my eyes to self-evident facts; I declared that the lady had some secret virtues which no one but Mr. Mordaunt had been able to discover, and that, as his wife, she would exhibit herself in a new character. But it was all in vain. My ideal was destroyed; and as time wore on, I saw more and more plainly what was the one indulged fault which had eaten into a character otherwise so wonderfully noble. Mr. Mordaunt married for ambition, and he lived for ambition, and when he had all but reached the goal at which he aimed, God called him hence. I cannot let myself dwell upon his career; I only recall it from time to time in order to explain to myself why I think and feel as I do; why I have never been able to convert men into heroes; and how it was that, whilst still young, I was able to marry a man whom, though I respected, I could scarcely be said to love. I had given up all hope of love. Mr. Mordaunt's equal in attraction I was quite sure I should never find, and yet I could not be excited by anything inferior. Involuntarily

I compared all men with him, and none came up to the standard; and if they had done so, I should have suspected them, because I had been disappointed in him. So I became cold and indifferent, and I can see now that I was unconsciously repelling. I was open only to one influence, and, at length, that was excited. I married from compassion—it is the only term I can find for the feeling I had. Colonel Anstruther was nearly old enough to be my father. He had been devoted to his first wife: he was miserable in his loneliness. His two little girls, Ina (as she was called, after a pet name of her mother's), and Cecil, were not old enough to be a comfort to him; and he was obliged to return to the Cape, whilst they were to be left in England with their grandmother, for education. He told me all this plainly. He did not profess to offer me the enthusiastic affection which he had felt before, but he said that I was the only person who resembled his wife; that he had found a comfort in my society which, up to that time, had been denied him; and that if I would consent to marry him, the effort to make me happy would give a new hope to his life.

I was then eight-and-twenty, and I had gone through the mental experiences which belong to comparative age. It seemed to me that we met upon equal ground. He had lost what he once enjoyed: I had no expectation of obtaining what I had dreamt of. We did not deceive each other. I was intensely sorry for him. I looked up to him with respect, and was flattered by the idea of consoling him; and I had theories of self-sacrifice which there seemed little opportunity of realising, and so, to the surprise of every one, I accepted him.

We were married, and almost immediately afterwards went to the Cape. I do not think my husband ever repented the step he had taken: I cannot absolutely say that I did so. What my life would have been if I had

remained unmarried it is not easy to imagine; but my mother died soon after I left England, and my father survived her only two years. He left but a small provision for me. He had lived lavishly during his lifetime, and latterly had met with great losses. If my two sisters had lived we should have been all but penniless; as it was, I must have lived in poverty and loneliness, and the trial would, in one sense, have been more severe than that of my married life. In another? I should have had a less burden upon my conscience than I have now. Yet I tried to do my duty. The world would say I did it. But I was timid. I never could overcome a feeling of fear—my husband was so much older—and —— but it is better not to analyse. The world respected him, so did I, for his uprightness and kindness of heart. If he did not come up to my standard, and if my heart was often weary and lonely because he could not understand and sympathise with me, the fault lay with myself. I knew what I desired, and I voluntarily relinquished the hope of ever meeting with it.

But he never said that he thought me cold. I was a brightness and help to him; perhaps that was all he needed. He might have been distressed if I had given him a love which he could not return.

And at last, when he became ill, he could not bear any one else to be with him; he would take nothing unless I brought it to him, and when I made myself ill by my close attendance upon him, he grew so anxious and affectionate! I felt then that I loved him far better than I knew, and the thought of losing him and being left without protection was most bitter. But I was afraid still—very much afraid. I did not know all that was passing in his mind, for he seldom talked to me upon personal religious subjects, though he used to have long

conversations with our clergyman. But he knew that he was dying, and made all necessary worldly preparations for death; and some that were—I do not know what to call them; I have thought of them continually since, questioning whether I could have acted differently when I was called upon to take part in them, but I have never been able to decide. Two days before his death, he called me to his bedside very early, and said he had some instructions to give about the children. He spoke quite calmly and rationally; there was nothing to make me think that his mind was in the least disturbed. He said that he wished me to know the provision which had been made for me and the four little ones. He desired me to consult his lawyer, Mr. Grey, as to investments, and to be guided entirely by him. Ina and Cecil would have their mother's fortune of three hundred a year each. This money was placed in the hands of trustees, but otherwise he left them to my guardianship entirely; and in order to keep them longer under my control, he had, he said, arranged that they should not be of age till they were two-and-twenty. He thanked me for having made him happy, and then he added that he had one more favour to ask. His requests had always been commands, and I put my mind at once into a state of acquiescence. I observed there was a slight hesitation, but after the first moment he conquered it, and went on fluently. Ina and Cecil, he said, had, as I already knew, a relation on their mother's side—an uncle who had always been objectionable to him. Mr. Penryhn was a man of bad character, and low drunken habits. There had never been any intercourse between the families. He had emigrated to Australia, and probably would never return to England; but there were sons and daughters, he did not know how many, and having the greatest possible dread of hereditary tendencies, and being desirous to guard against

future contingencies, he begged me to promise that if ever Mr. Penryhn's children and his should be thrown together, I would never give my consent to a marriage. He looked at me as he spoke with such fixedness that I actually trembled, and again he asked me, in the quick tone which had so often startled me into saying, 'yes,' before I had time to consider. Yet I did think; and I went over in my own mind the reasons why I should or should not consent. I have always dreaded to make promises, yet I felt that this one might perhaps be a support to me. I feared hereditary tendencies just as much as my husband. I was certain that it would make me wretched, if any of my own children were to marry into such a family as Mr. Penryhn's; and even if I had been inclined to demur in making the promise with regard to them, I scarcely felt that I was at liberty to do so with regard to my step-children: so I consented.

My husband thanked me as he had never before thanked me in his life. He was tired, and sank back on his pillow. It was the last opportunity I had of speaking to him on the subject. Very soon afterwards a great change took place; he became unconscious, and in eight and forty hours I was a widow.

I put down these things simply as memoranda. I can express no feeling about them. This is not a journal of feeling, but of facts. God supported me through that time, and He supports me now. I would only record also that when the will was opened I found, to my surprise, that if my own children were to marry without my consent they would forfeit their share of their father's fortune. If I had been consulted I should have objected to this arrangement. I should never seek to carry any point by such means. But I had no choice in the matter. All I can do will be so to educate them that they may never wish to form an undesirable connection.

I stayed at the Cape ten months after my husband's death, and then came to England with my four little ones. I am undecided as yet where to settle. Mrs. Penryhn—Ina and Cecil's grandmother—wishes us to be near her, but I am sure that it will be better not. The children have hitherto looked to her house as home, at least in the holidays, and she has had the control of them. I have heard that she has a dictatorial temper, and if we were close to her she would very naturally wish to interfere, and then we might clash. I desire above all things to keep on good terms with the Penryhns. I shall never be able to influence the children for good if I do not. I have written to Mrs. Penryhn saying, what is very true, that I am anxious to be by the seaside, at least for some time. I wish to try bathing for myself and the little ones, and perhaps it may be good for Ina and Cecil. So I have left the question of our ultimate home uncertain, though in my own mind I have resolved that it shall be fixed where I can have the children to myself. 'Very decided,' said Mr. Grey to me the other day, when I told him that I had already made my plans, and knew perfectly well what I intended to do. Yes, on this point I am very decided. But oh! how I long—long to rest and to obey!

CHAPTER II.

May 15.—I think I have found a house—a cottage rather, about half a mile from the village of Dernham, and a mile and a half from Westford. It is farther from the sea than I like, but it is the only place of the kind to be had, and the few lodgings in Dernham are so small that they would not accommodate us; and at Westford they are ruinously expensive. It is a long low cottage, covered with creepers, and it stands on a little green lawn, and fronts the sea. I shall have a fair-sized drawing-room and dining-room, a small study, a good-sized bedroom for myself, another with a very tiny dressing-closet, for a spare room, an airy day nursery, with a night nursery adjoining, which I think will do for the Nurse, Agnes, and little Esther; and three attics. The largest of these I mean to fit up very comfortably for Ina and Cecil; Charley and Hugh will have one of the others, and the third, with a room over the kitchen, will be for the servants. I have thought a good deal about putting Ina and Cecil into the attic. My impulse is to give them the best of everything; but I suspect that is rather a step-mother's pride. I want to show the world how well they are treated; but the safe rule in all these cases is, truth of position. They ought not to have a better room than I have, and it would be uncourteous to put our guests in the attic whilst the two girls have the most comfortable accommodation in the house; so, much against my inclination, I have determined to send them upstairs. But I am planning how to have the room

made comfortable, and especially to ensure privacy for each. I think I shall be able to put up a partition, so as almost to make it like two rooms. I remember how I suffered when I was a child, and when my sisters shared my room, because I never had a corner in which I could be to myself, and how many bad habits were engendered by constant publicity. I recollect on one occasion particularly, when a young friend came to stay with us, the house happened to be full, and we all three slept in one room, and still no one ever thought of putting up a screen to make a dressing-closet, and certainly we never thought of asking for such a thing, and so we were forced into intimacy of the most undesirable kind. To us, at the time, it was mere fun; we had never been accustomed to be particular in these matters. But it was not so afterwards. The utter absence of reserve in habits, brought on equal unreserve in conversation; and those evening gossipings, as we sat in our dressing-gowns round the fire, and discussed subjects which we should not have ventured to approach if we had met in the drawing-room in our ordinary attire, did me mischief which I can feel to this day. I do not know how Ina and Cecil have been brought up in these respects; but I shall do my very best to make them particular. People declare that purity of mind will ensure purity in word and action; no doubt it will; yet I am rather inclined to reverse the maxim and say, that purity in word and action will ensure purity of mind. At any rate, I am quite certain that if young persons can bring themselves to say and do what is unfitting, though it may be in a very slight degree, they will indulge in thoughts which go much further, and it is this which is to me so grievous. That special promise to the 'pure in heart' has always struck me so very much.

I must give up the study to the children, and keep my bedroom for my own sitting-room. It will be small, but

I can make it comfortable, and I must have some place for rest and solitude. The burden of life seems to press upon me more heavily now that I am planning to begin regular housekeeping alone, and to have the two elder girls with me; it seems such an experiment; and I feel so lonely, and am so afraid of making blunders! Mr. Grey is a great help; he is so straightforward, and not too hopeful; rather the reverse, indeed. Very hopeful people always give me a feeling of insecurity.

My married life seems such a dream! I reproach myself for ingratitude. I did not know what I was saved from when I had no responsibility—nothing to do but to obey; and I reproach myself for so many omissions. Thank God, my husband never complained of me; if he had done so, I think now it would break my heart.

May 18. A lodging at Westford.—I have been to Dernham, to the cottage, again this morning. I suspect it will not be ready for us for the next month. In that time I must prepare Mrs. Penryhn for my plans. It will not be wise to delay, or the report will reach her from some other source. My husband used always to say, that it is wise to forestall rumour, to tell yourself what you know must be told eventually; and I shall soften matters by suggesting that Ina and Cecil can, if she should wish it, spend a portion of June and nearly the whole of July with her as usual, and then join me instead of going back to school. I think they will like the cottage; the view from the front is lovely, looking through an arch in the wood to the sea studded with vessels, and the opposite coast with its white houses, and high chalk downs softened by the distance. There will be room for flower-beds on the lawn; but I do not think I shall mark them out till the autumn: I must be content now to keep the turf nicely mown. The shrubs are rather overgrown, and the gravel-paths round the lawn, and in the little kitchen-garden,

require weeding: that must be first cared for. My landlord wants me to take the paddock next the kitchen-garden, and keep some cows; but I must wait and see my way about that. I am terribly afraid of expense; and I do not as yet know what the trustees will allow me for the care of the two girls. It is strange to myself to find how much more anxious I am about them than about my own little ones; but then I know that just now Charley is safe and happy, paying a visit to Mr. Grey; and little Agnes, and Hugh, and my tiny Esther, are all day long on the shore, I hope gaining health and strength. I must begin a few lessons, though, with Agnes and Hugh to-morrow: all play and no work will not do constantly for nine years old, nor even for seven. The next thing I do must be to go over to Ravensworth, and see Ina and Cecil at their school. I wish so much that I could have gone to them when I first landed in England; but their visit to Lincolnshire in the Easter holidays interfered; and since they went back to school the necessity of bringing the little ones here for sea air has caused a delay; but I must, if possible, go next week. I really know nothing of the two girls, and can only think of them as little fair creatures of four and five years old; such they were when I saw them just before my marriage,—nearly eleven years ago that is; and since then they have known me only by letters and report, the latter, I suspect, not being very favourable, for the Penryhns never liked the marriage, and took care to let me see it. There has been no particular show of affection on the children's part; I do not see how there could be under the circumstances; and I felt from the first that forced or assumed feeling was much worse than none, and therefore I have never tried to urge upon them the claims of my position. They have written to me as 'Mamma;' but I heartily wish that they could have used a more truthful word. If they had been

older when I married, I should have tried to invent a name. It is the unnaturalness of a step-mother's position that causes such heartburning and disunion in families. The French, I imagine, use the word *belle-mère*; which would express at once the precise relation; there is no strain upon the feelings in adopting it. English people insist upon 'Mamma' and 'Mother,' and so there springs up a feeling of estrangement, which often has no other foundation than the endeavour to establish a false relation as true. As I said before, if I had been living with the children, and they had been older, I should have insisted upon adopting some other name than 'Mamma;' as it was, I followed the world's custom; but I did my best to neutralise it by always signing myself your affectionate step-mother. The Penryhns were, I believe, startled at first, and said it was just like me—very peculiar; but it put me at once on a right footing, and has enabled me to make my way with the children, by touching every now and then, though indirectly, upon the subject which ought to be, and which I believe is, very near their heart—their own mother's feelings and wishes respecting them. Still I am afraid they are inclined to look askance at me. I smile to myself sometimes as I think that it is so. If they did but know me, if they could but tell how instantaneously my heart goes forth to young girls of their age, indeed, to any children of any age! It is as well they do not, for they would be aware then that it is my weakness. I am called strict with my own little ones, and yet a child is a perfect temptation to me; I can scarcely resist caressing it; and so it often is with girls, especially if they show me the least affection in return. I am obliged to keep a check upon myself lest I should spoil them.

It is curious to observe how these sympathies are distributed amongst different people. I so often hear my friends say that they like teaching boys; that they can

get on with them so much better than girls ; whereas I have always felt rather afraid of boys, except when they are very little. I am always fearful of making blunders, saying something they will not understand, or which will jar upon them ; and I dread expressing more feeling than will suit their masculine pride and reserve. One cannot help oneself either in a difficulty by caressing a boy as one can a girl. A kiss will frequently say so much more than words ; but boys generally object to being kissed, it offends their dignity. Of course it is different with one's own boys ; but even with them I do not feel, as some mothers do, that I could venture to educate them at home. Mr. Grey will, I trust, find out a good school for Charley : he must be made manly and independent, and taught to think less of himself. Up to this time he has been a little spoilt by drawing-room admiration, though I have done my very best to keep him from it ; but, handsome little fellow as he is, every one will notice him, and talk of his beautiful dark eyes and curly hair ; and he is quite aware of it, and puts himself in the way of visitors, till I am obliged to be almost sharp with him. Happily, he is perfectly obedient—they are all that : I should reproach myself bitterly if they were not. I wonder how it will be with Ina and Cecil.

May 25.—The cottage progresses slowly, but I hope surely. The workmen tell me it will be ready in a fortnight ; in my own mind I say a month, and shall make my preparations accordingly. I have written to Mrs. Penrhyn and told her my plans ; I hope I did it courteously and kindly ; but one can never calculate how an announcement that is not liked will be received. Try as one will to make it pleasant, one is sure to be told that there was something in the turn of the sentences which was calculated to give offence. I should have been glad to have shown my letter to some one who would have been an

unprejudiced adviser. A piece of wisdom which I have learnt by rather bitter experience is, not to trust to my own judgment of a letter I have written, at least, if it is of any importance. One can never tell the weight of one's own words, or foresee the impression they will make. But I have no one here whom I can consult upon any point. Coming as a stranger, and at first professedly only for a short time, no one has as yet called on me. The Randolphins of Woodleigh, whose grounds adjoin the cottage, are away: their place is small but very pretty, and kept in excellent order. I shall never make the cottage lawn look like theirs: they have a walk through the woods down to the beach at Dernham which excites my envy. Hayes, my landlord, took me through it the other day. Such splendid over-arching trees there are on each side of the path, and such lovely glimpses of the sea through the wood! and the foreground rather a steep descent, carpeted with moss and wild flowers. The sunlight gleams in the wood make my heart dance with joy now, even as they did when I was a child. We are so close to Woodleigh that it would be awkward if we were not to be good neighbours. There is a door in the wall between our little kitchen-garden and theirs; and Hayes, who is a kind of bailiff to every one in this part of the world, tells me that in former days the inmates of Woodleigh and Dernham Cottage lived as one family. That is not my idea of comfort in life; I hope it is not Mr. Randolph's. In order to secure freedom in social intercourse, there must, I am convinced, always be clearly defined limits which, from constant habit, there is no wish to transgress. Each party then understands what may or may not be done. So I mean to have the garden-gate closed, and never to suppose it possible that it could be opened.

Sir John and Lady Anson, at the Manor, the Harcourts,

at Northbourne Park, Captain Shaw, at Carlton Lodge, and a Mrs. Bradshaw, at Beechwood, are our nearest neighbours. The rectory is at the farthest end of the village, and the rector himself is just now absent. I shall be amused to note what I think of all these people when we meet. I always like to remember first impressions, and compare them with subsequent ones. I don't think mine are very often correct, at least, I never pique myself upon them. I wonder how many of the persons I have mentioned will cease to be *persons*, and become friends. One thing I like about this place is, that in spite of its being near a watering-place like Westford, it is still very quiet and primitive. I believe that is because a good deal of the property in the neighbourhood belongs to Sir John Anson, and he will not sell it to be built upon. He was formerly an Indian officer, and was made a Knight of the Bath, after distinguishing himself in some of the frontier battles: then his bachelor brother died, and so he inherited the Manor property. His conservative principles do not, I am afraid, always tend in the right direction, for Hayes says that Sir John is the great obstacle in the way of the restoration of the church, and that he is afraid of having his family pew taken away. I trust we shall have no church squabbles. I have heard but little of the rector, who is unmarried, except that he has a good clear voice, rather a stiff manner, and takes a great interest in the schools. I sometimes think whether I was wise in deciding to take the cottage before I was quite certain as to the condition of church matters in this part of the world; but, on the other hand, there are so many changes constantly occurring, that if I had fixed myself in any place, because I specially liked the clergyman, I might have found directly I became settled that he was going away. I must bring up the children to be independent of these outward circumstances; to feel that truth and

right exist apart from persons and places. For myself, I should have rejoiced above all things in a daily service; I know nothing so resting: but I should certainly not have expected Ina and Cecil to go to it, unless they expressed a decided wish to do so, which I suppose they would not be likely to do. Religion is of all subjects the one in respect to which one must be most patient with young people. God is dealing with them in a way we know nothing about; and, as it is in nature, if we force the bud open before its time, it will die.

CHAPTER III.

May 30.—A letter from Mrs. Penryhn; rather stiff—her letters always are stiff—but courteous upon the whole. She is too well bred to be angry; I wish I could think she was not suspicious; but there is that in her letter which implies (what I always feared she would think) that from a love of power I used my influence with my husband to secure the guardianship of the children to myself. Mr. Grey hinted at something of the same kind. People suppose that because one is earnest, perhaps I ought to say eager, in the endeavour to exercise power rightly, therefore one is anxious for it. However, I must bear that. It would be an endless task to attempt to set the world right in its opinion of oneself. Perhaps, too, I do love power. I have never imagined that I did; but I will make a memorandum of the accusation in my own mind, so that I may watch against the temptation. Mrs. Penryhn accepts the idea of keeping the children with her till the middle of July with tolerable graciousness; but she regrets, she says, that I should feel compelled to fix my residence at such a distance from Arling. She fears that, at her age, communication with Dernham will be difficult, and she had hoped that, since she was denied the happiness of having her dear grandchildren in the same house, she might at least have had them in the same village; but no doubt I am the best judge of my own arrangements. I was tempted at first to say ‘Of course I am,’ but I have really no reason to complain. Mrs. Penryhn merely feels as I should in her place. The idea of living

in the same village though is simply out of the question: It would have been most uncomfortable for both parties. I am so thankful now that I did not propound my present plan before I had finally arranged it. I should have had schemes suggested on all sides, and I must have carried out my own views, and then there would have been annoyance. I have learnt that it is a great thing in this world not to give people the opportunity of giving or taking offence by putting it in their power to offer advice which cannot be followed.

June 6.—An eventful day. I have seen the children, as it almost seemed, for the first time; they are so totally changed. I went to Ravenscroft—where they are at school—this morning, taking the eight o'clock train, and was there by twelve; and I left it again at four, and am only just returned, heartily tired, rather excited, and with my head in a complete whirl, but upon the whole I think satisfied. They are very interesting girls. I should have been attracted by them even if the tie between us had not been what it is. I never was at Ravenscroft before; it is an intricate rambling old town, and I had some difficulty in finding the school out. Though every one knew the name of Albert House, no one seemed able to direct me to it. I found it at last, standing back from the road, with a green and trees in front—a plain red brick house, large enough it seemed to lodge a regiment. I was shown into a comfortable drawing-room, and waited for about ten minutes before the children appeared. There were sounds of pianos on all sides, and sundry rushings up and down stairs, which made me feel foolishly nervous. At last came some quick steps, followed by a decided pause at the drawing-room door. I was quite ashamed of myself for feeling as I did; I could really have run away, if there had been any place to run to. I did not fear what I should think of them, but I

dreaded what they would think of me, and a sense of helplessness and nothingness came over me; just such as one often has when at one's prayers, and which can be soothed only in the same way. But it all vanished when the door opened timidly and the two girls entered. They came in shyly, though Ina tried to look womanly and unconscious. I went forward to meet them: it was an effort to me to restrain myself. I felt towards them as they could not possibly feel towards me, and I dared not show it too much, lest I might chill them. So I only kissed them tenderly, and said 'I was so glad to see them, and had been longing to come before, but had not been able;' and then they sat down by me, and I was able to examine and watch them, and make up my mind about them, so far as I ever can from a first impression.

Ina is tall for her age; she is more than fifteen, slight and graceful, with a long neck, and her head placed remarkably well upon her shoulders. Her face, too, promises great beauty; her complexion is clear, and her features are regular; the forehead high, the eyes hazel, with rather arched eyebrows; the nose, perhaps, a little too large, but the mouth and chin really lovely; the mouth so small and sweet in its expression, and the dimpled chin so clearly cut. It is the chin which gives character to her face, otherwise I should have said there was something wanting in its power of attraction. Her hair is dark, like her eyes; she dresses it, I am sure, according to the latest fashion, though I have not studied the fashions sufficiently myself, since I came to England, to be quite sure what that is; but there is an unmistakable air about her which, I suppose, I must call style, for want of some better and more agreeable word. What I feel is that she is too young to have it. She is not in the least affected, but she moves as if she was quite sure that she was doing just the correct thing—as if she had been trained and

taught till there could be no fear of making a mistake, and putting forward the left foot when it ought to be the right; and there is a peculiar swing of her very full dress, when she walks across the room, which destroys the idea of the ease and simplicity of childhood. She is, in fact, quite the 'young lady;' and, as a rule, I do not think I admire juvenile 'young ladies.' They savour too much of the dancing-school, and the dressmaker's show-room. But, on the other hand, the expression of Ina's face when she forgets propriety and becomes a little excited, is really charming, it is so good-tempered, and the eyes light up with an intelligence which quite excites one to talk to her. And then her voice—it is that I believe which fascinated me more than anything else—it is really what people romantically call silvery—rather low-pitched, with a good deal of variety in the intonation; and there is a little peculiarity in her accent, which would have given me the idea that she had lived abroad a good deal; not that she has done so, but I suspect she inherits it from her mother, who was brought up in Italy. It is just one of those peculiarities which would be intolerable if there was the least affectation in it; but being as it is, quite unconscious, one listens to it with the interest which attaches to anything that marks a refined individuality.

Cecil, who is a year and a half younger, is by no means so striking. She is tall and well made; but she is quite the child, looking the picture of health, with a very fair complexion, a little freckled; a most brilliant colour; grey eyes, rather small, but lighting up like her sister's when she is interested; and, like Ina also, she has an extremely pretty mouth; but the shape of the face is different, it is oval instead of square, and she has rather high cheek bones. There is a slight tinge of red in the hair; but it is just the tint which will deepen into a very pretty brown. She holds herself very upright, and walks remarkably

well ; but there is nothing like fashion about her, which I confess pleases me all the more. I should say she had been a romp as a little girl ; there is a look of fun and high spirits in her eyes, which would lead one to imagine that she may have required rather a strict check ; whereas Ina, I should think, was never off her guard. Cecil's manner is a little brusque, her voice pleasant, but in no way remarkable ; and though I can trace a sisterly peculiarity in her accent, it would not have struck me but for the resemblance to Ina's. I have noted all these outward traits because I have drawn my conclusions from them more than from anything the children said. There was naturally somewhat of effort and restraint in their conversation : I asked questions, and they answered me. I suppose the subjects they would have been most at home with would have been their school life and their lessons ; but I dislike showing what must appear curiosity ; and girls of their age resent it if they have good feeling, and if they have not they pour forth a torrent of school-girl chatter which is odious ; so we kept upon the surface. I did not even ask them if they were happy and liked their governess. As they are so soon to leave school, it did not seem a matter of much consequence, and I felt as if it would put Mrs. Harrison in a false position, and lead them to look upon her as a person to be criticised instead of revered. I talked to them chiefly about Arling and their grandmamma, and told them what my plans for them were. They seemed at first scarcely to know whether they were pleased or the contrary ; when, however, I said that I should like them to think what colour they would prefer for the paper in their bedroom, and the curtains, Ina began to consider the matter, whilst Cecil looked up quietly and said, ' You are very kind,' and put her little face near to be kissed ; and then Ina followed her example, and we advanced several steps

towards understanding each other, for they began to question me. The queries I felt were characteristic. Ina asked about our neighbours, and the village, and Westford; the size of the garden, the drawing-room, and the dining-room; whilst Cecil took more interest in the fact of my intention to keep two cows and some poultry. I was longing all the time to make them care for my dear Charley and Agnes, and Hugh and Essie; but I was resolved not to press any subject which touched upon our mutual relations. Of course I mentioned the little ones, and both of them, Ina especially, took all proper interest in them when I did so; but there was nothing spontaneous in their enquiries. I said laughingly, that they were little half-brothers and sisters, who I hoped might some day become three-quarters, as they never could be whole ones; and just then I remarked that the two girls drew nearer to each other, as though tacitly consenting to the fact that no one could ever be to them what they were to each other. It goes against me to speak in this manner; I do so long to have my family all one; and these two elder children touch my heart in a way they can little imagine. But I will be patient, and lay the foundation of our mutual relations in truth, and then the superstructure will be firm. I think I made a pleasant impression upon them, for they asked me really heartily whether I should not be at Arling with them; and Cecil said, with a smile brightening her little honest face, 'Do come; Ina and I shall like it so much!' I was obliged to remind them that a visit at Arling depended on their grandmamma; and then I saw that Ina looked at Cecil, as if to caution her against imprudence, and I felt in my own mind that the children knew I should not be welcome. It is very painful to have this consciousness of prejudice lurking in one's mind continually; but I mean to battle against it by remember-

ing that I should, in all probability, share it, if I were in Mrs. Penryhn's place. One thing at least I am certain of, that it would almost break my heart to have these two girls taken from me after I had been their guardian and best friend for eight years, and to have them placed under the care of another person professing a title to their affection superior to mine, and yet which had in reality no foundation. The unreality of the relation would jar upon me beyond expression. I hope never to forget this in my intercourse with Mrs. Penrhyn, and perhaps when she sees that I am willing fully to acknowledge her right, and that I do not wish to urge upon the children a mother's claim of love, till I have performed a mother's duties, she will look upon me differently.

I think Ina is cautious and reserved: I observed this when we spoke of Arling and the Penrhyn family generally. I asked—to satisfy a misgiving in my own mind—whether their eldest uncle was in Australia still? And Cecil was going to give an answer with some explanations, but Ina took the words out of her mouth, and said quickly she believed he was; but they had not heard from him lately. That promise of mine flits, at times, like a ghost before me, when I look into the future; yet, why should it? I meant to do right; I think I was right; at least, I do not think I could have done otherwise than I did. But does that constitute right? I say to myself, 'Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof;' and I pray God to help me.

Before leaving Ravenscroft I had a little conversation with Mrs. Harrison about the children. She gave a very good report of them, and said that Ina was certainly clever, and that Cecil had very good abilities; but that she was—as one might judge from her eyes—more devoted to play than study. I asked if they were true and open; and the answer was, 'Yes; that is,

quite as much so as most girls of their age'—a reply which did not satisfy me. Why are not girls open? What is it which makes them join in little mean plots and tricks? But I do not think these two children, especially Cecil, ever could be mean. If they are not perfectly open, it must be because they accept the standard of others, and think it no harm if, 'living at Rome, they do as Romans do.' Perhaps there is something which tends to anti-openness in school-girls in the fact that they live in the midst of two worlds—their own school world and their governess's world—and that, as a general rule, they know little or nothing of the latter, and so imagine that their interests are distinct. I think if I had pupils my great object would be to make these two worlds one. Some private matters must of course be kept to oneself; but that would be the case even in a home. But as regards friends, visits, daily engagements, and domestic affairs, I should strive to have everything as much known as possible. For, after all, these are the things which really train and educate the mind. Girls are to have homes of their own to manage: they must learn to live in society, and to steer a safe course through its difficulties; and whilst shut up in a schoolroom and concentrating all their interests in it, they must, in a great degree, remain ignorant of the actual world in which they are hereafter to bear a part. Then, too, if they know what is going on around them, there is no room left for curiosity, and one can never tell how fatal the indulgence of that feminine propensity may be. I remember well in my own school-days how we used to talk over the little comings and goings and apparent mysteries—which I dare say were really no mysteries at all—connected with our governess's life; what speculations there used to be about them, and what mean prying went on amongst some who had been brought up with a low tone upon such matters.

I believe that confidence and openness are amongst the most powerful influences for good in education ; and I hope by their means to do much towards gaining these dear children's hearts. I have begun by telling them that they are not to have a governess at Dernham, but that I mean to teach them myself, with the assistance of masters from Westford. They are to write to me and send me a list of the lessons they learn now, and the hours they keep, which may be a kind of guide to me in my plans. I was quite sure this question of lessons would be one which their young heads would work upon a good deal, so I resolved to stop all curiosity and discussion at once. I am afraid they think me wonderfully clever to be able to undertake such a task, but I must try and work myself up to it.

CHAPTER IV.

June 12. Dernham Cottage.—I have been so busy for the last few days that I have not been able to make any memoranda of what I have been doing. Since I came back from Ravenscroft, I have been settling myself at the cottage, superintending and ordering. Also I have engaged a new nurse, a Mary Drayton, who I hope and think will do well; only I am afraid she will consider me very particular. She cannot at all understand why I insist upon having Hugh dressed in Charley's room instead of in the nursery with Agnes; and she thinks me a great fidget because I choose to have a screen put up in the night nursery, so as to make a kind of little dressing-room for Agnes, or at least to accustom her to the idea of privacy. Also I have had a battle with her, because I say that whilst the children are being dressed and undressed I will not allow anyone but myself to go in and out of the room. But these are points in which I am resolved to have my own way. If the children are to be refined and pure-minded when they are grown up, they must learn refinement and purity in their infancy, and the lesson can only be taught by practice. I choose to have them as particular in their behaviour in the nursery as they are in the drawing-room, and then, when left to themselves in after years, they will carry the same particularity into their bedrooms. And what a world of terrible evil may thus be avoided, one almost trembles to think! This unsettled life is not good for Agnes; she is beginning to dislike her lessons, and to think it a hardship that she must attend to them an hour

before going on the shore. Yet, perhaps I am wrong in saying it is not good, it is only part of life's discipline. We must all learn to be fixed in the midst of unfixedness, if we are to be worth anything; and though my little woman might do her lessons better if there were less to distract her thoughts, she would not be called upon to exercise the same self-control. She lost a mark in her lesson register this morning because of her carelessness, and there were tears in consequence, and I was sorely tempted to excuse her, but I resisted. Having made the rule that if she had three faults she should lose her mark, I felt it was right to keep to it. When I said—

‘You know, Agnes, I can’t excuse you, because it is against the rule,’

She looked at me with her clear wondering eyes, and said—

‘But, mamma, why can’t you? Can’t you do anything you like?’

My answer was—

‘Yes, I can, if I like it; but, then, I don’t like it, because it is against the rule; and I desire to keep the rules myself, just as I make you keep them.’

It went to my heart to see the large drops roll down her little cheeks, but she acquiesced at once in the idea of a law, and there was no irritation or resentment. She said quickly—

‘Mamma, I will try more to-morrow.’

And then she went away happy. I wonder whether it will be as difficult to be strict with Ina and Cecil. As the time draws near for their coming to me, I feel more and more anxious. There was such a sense of relief when I came back from Ravenscroft and found myself with my own little ones, and thought that I was responsible to no one on earth for my management of them. I know that I shall delight in these elder girls; I feel most hopeful of

making them happy ; but the idea that all their relations and friends will look on and criticise, and that some will have the right, as well as the inclination, to find fault, touches my pride. Mr. Grey writes me word that he thinks he has heard of a school, kept by a Mr. Pierce, in Hampshire, which will be just the thing for Charley. I am not sure that I am quite pleased. I have a mother's foolish dread of his being sent into the wide world alone, but he will be fit for nothing without it. And there is, in his case, one objection to home life, which, if there were no others, would, in my opinion, be quite conclusive—he would infallibly be spoilt by the petting and worshipping of women and girls. Even sensible and really good men are ruined by women's worship, and certainly one cannot expect a boy to stand up against it. I suppose the common saying is correct, a woman's temptation is vanity ; a man's, selfishness. I think myself that the faults are very often reversed, at least, I have known many vain men and many selfish women ; but, anyhow, it is wise to accept these bits of traditional wisdom, for they are the result of a longer experience than any single individual can have. In Charley's case, too, I can see that the temptation would be selfishness ; in a refined form, indeed, such as fastidiousness, exclusiveness, particularity about comfort and meals ; but not the less selfishness. And these are just the weaknesses which sisters would foster, because they would not jar like roughness and hastiness of temper. The most unselfish man I ever knew was brought up under the eye of a very wise mother, who never allowed him, because he was a boy, any privileges above his sisters, but made him share in everything equally with them, and taught him in the nursery to pay them the same little courtesies which would afterwards be required in the drawing-room. I shall have a different task with

Hugh, who is in a perfect whirlwind of excitement the moment he is contradicted, but supremely generous and loving when everything goes smoothly ; and, being quite indifferent to the amenities of life, does not, in the least, understand his brother's fancies. Agnes has sometimes a difficult task to keep peace between them, but with her gentle wisdom she manages it wonderfully well, at least, when she will exert herself. Indolence will be her fault.

June 16.—My first introduction to my neighbours. I had a perfect levee this afternoon. First the Harcourts—Mrs. Harcourt and a daughter—quite grown up, and come out, as one could see by the self-assurance with which she came into the room. Very decidedly in the fashion both of them. We talked of little nothings—the weather, and the climate, and the views :—I could have gone though it all in my sleep: only one thing struck me ; the peculiar tone of something more than indifference with which Mrs. Howard said, speaking of the Randolphins, ‘ We don’t see much of them.’ Is it fashionable or moral contempt ?—for contempt there certainly was. But I don’t think Mrs. Howard’s contempt would influence me. She swept out of the room as she had swept in, and her daughter followed, casting one of those curious glances around, as she went out, which is so indicative of the schoolroom curiosity of sixteen, quickened by the impertinent fashion of eighteen. Ina and Cecil must never be like that. Then, just as Mrs. Harcourt was leaving the room, came Sir John and Lady Anson ; he a fine elderly man, nearly sixty, I should think ; no doubt very brave, but not, I should imagine, remarkable in any other way. He is a most unquestionable conservative, and thunders out his anathemas against change right and left. And Lady Anson, a faded but refined beauty, follows with a gentle echo of ‘ Yes, cer-

tainly, we think—we feel—we regret.’ Marriage has, in her case, I suspect, been not union, but absorption. These, however, are but first impressions. What I feel about them both at present is simply that they can never see with my eyes, and I trust never to see with theirs. Open to correction of course this opinion is, and I note it just for that purpose. If I were talking instead of writing, I could say a great deal about Sir John’s merits as a landlord, of which everyone speaks highly, but all that is *sous-entendu* with oneself.

I did not know that Sir John’s son was at Oxford, till the fact was alluded to by Captain Shaw, who came before the Ansons were gone. He is, like Sir John, a military officer, stiff, but very courteous, quite of the old school. The expression of his face won my interest as soon as he entered, it is so simple, good, and honest. He appeared to be intimate with the Ansons, and several enquiries about this son Harry passed between them.

‘Have you heard from Harry lately, Sir John?’

‘Lady Anson had a letter from him yesterday. He has just taken his degree, and will be home soon. He never writes to me unless he wants money.’ (A laugh.)

‘Ah! young men of the present day! They are not what they used to be in our time. Eh! Lady Anson?’

A meek smile, but no words. Lady Anson only looked to her husband.

‘Harry is a good fellow enough. We have no reason to find fault with him, Captain Shaw; none at all, compared with others.’

‘He is a very dear fellow,’ murmured Lady Anson.

‘No doubt; and dear fellows are all very well; but what we want is good men, steady, honest, brave——’

‘My poor Harry——’ again began Lady Anson, in an almost inaudible tone.

Captain Shaw continued—

‘Fit to command, dear madam; Nelsons, Wellingtons; or, if you like it better, Pitts, Cannings; but the race is extinct.’

The Captain turned suddenly to me.

‘Forgive me, madam; I hope you like your new residence?’

The usual answer: ‘I liked it as yet extremely, found it very comfortable, much enjoyed being near the sea,’ &c. &c.

‘And you have children, madam, to interest you. I have met them on the beach—excellently well brought up—perfectly obedient.’

Lady Anson evidently took fright at the last words.

‘I think we must be going, Sir John.’

It was the first spontaneous sentence she had uttered.

‘I will ask you to give Harry a hearty remembrance from me, Lady Anson. Tell him I want him for fishing. I wish we could go into Wales together. Capital sport there is up amongst the hills by Aber, beyond Penmaen-mawr.’

‘Harry promises to come home at once.’

‘Then let him come; there is nothing like keeping promises. But you must spare him to me afterwards. I go about the 27th.’

‘We will see, we will see,’ was Sir John’s rather hasty answer.

I don’t think either he or Lady Anson felt sorry to escape from Captain Shaw’s criticism. Neither was I sorry to be alone again, when after a ten minutes’ visit, chiefly occupied by lamentations over the sins of young England, the Captain also departed. Yet he is an honest-hearted, earnest-minded man, I am sure of that, and I am specially pleased with him for calling my children obedient. Mrs. Bradshaw came about half an hour afterwards. She was the last of my visitors, and certainly the most amusing.

I should imagine her to be about fifty. She is not particularly fascinating in appearance; her features are too large; though I can fancy she has been handsome. But the eyes, which are a very dark grey, are the quickest I ever saw. They take in everything, and comment upon everything, and are, in fact, a kind of visible working brain. If one could only look at and watch them, one might tell all her thoughts. But when she talks, all one's attention is engrossed in endeavouring to follow her. A cousin of hers was intimate with me at the Cape, so that we knew about each other, and met as if already acquainted. We began upon the place, and the weather, and then our neighbours were mentioned. Mrs. Bradshaw did not discuss the latter in a gossiping way, but she was sharp upon them. I spoke of Sir John and Lady Anson.

'Excellent people!' was the reply, 'only they have made a mistake in being born in this generation. I doubt if they have found it out though; but it is that which gives them their surprised look. They were meant for good Queen Anne. Lady Anson might have been one of the Court favourites, a rival of Abigail Masham.'

I doubted whether Lady Anson would ever have had sufficient independence of character to be a rival to anyone.

'You may be right, but adjectives have strength from the mere fact that they are attached to substantives. Lady Anson alone is literally an adjective. You can form no abstract idea of her; she has neither speech, nor thought, nor feeling. Put her by the side of her husband and children, or anyone in whom she is interested, and she has all. But I am not come to discuss my neighbours, Mrs. Anstruther, but to make acquaintance with you.'

'I suppose,' I said, 'that one naturally falls into the bad habit of discussing one's neighbours, as one of the quickest modes of becoming acquainted. It shows what are one's mutual likings and dislikings.'

‘Do you think so? Well, I doubt; because, you see, there are so many little personal matters which come in to bias one’s judgment. I like lady Anson, because she once gave me a prescription which cured one of my little grandchildren of the croup: you can’t enter into that.’

‘Yes, so far as that it makes me think Lady Anson kind-hearted.’

‘She would have been a monster if she had not given it; but anyhow, I always remember it, and put it against any shortcomings in other ways. Not but what it is a daily matter of thankfulness to me that I am not her husband. I should have died of her before the honeymoon was over.’

I suppose I looked a little grave, quite unintentionally, for Mrs. Bradshaw instantly changed her tone.

‘That is very wrong of me, very satirical, and you don’t like satire. You are taking life upon the highest Christian principles.’

‘Why, yes,’ I said, and I hesitated, ‘I can’t quite see how one is to take it upon any other.’

‘Can’t you? But you have lived in Africa half your life, and you only understand heathens. You are not used to the steps and degrees of this moral and religious England of ours.’

‘I am used to varieties of character,’ I said, ‘if that is what you mean by steps and degrees.’

‘No, not varieties of character, but of aims, standards. You know it is dreadfully uncharitable in these days to call anyone wicked, and very ill-bred to suggest that any action is wrong. It is all a question of standards.’

‘I don’t know that I quite understand,’ I said.

‘Don’t you? but it is quite plain. Your standard is perfection, and you don’t even think ill of your neighbours; mine is human frailty, so I just whisper a few sharp words in a *tête-à-tête*. Miss Somebody—I won’t mention names—

has a standard below mine, and she gossips; and Miss Somebody-else has one still lower, and slanders. But we have none of us any compunctions of conscience; because, you see, there is no abstract right or wrong in these matters. It is only, as I said before, that we have various standards. Ah! my dear Mrs. Anstruther, these are easy days to live in. I am not so sure after all that the Ansons made a mistake in being born into them; that is, if they could only manage to fit themselves in, which they never can.'

I laughed, and wished I could say something in reply, but nothing suggested itself. One could not preach; so I merely remarked, 'that, from what I could hear, Sir John had managed to fit himself into his generation so far as regarded being a good landlord.'

Mrs. Bradshaw paused and considered. 'Yes, that is a safer subject, not so likely to bring qualms of conscience afterwards. Well! he is a good landlord, and Lady Anson is a good landlady, and the daughters are quite proper, and have a German governess, and Harry Anson is a gentlemanly fellow, and has just avoided being plucked at Oxford. Very nice people all! And now, what a hot summer we are having!'

I felt rather provoked, for I was sure I was misunderstood, and I suspect my answer was dry.

'You don't like the weather any more than the Ansons,' continued Mrs. Bradshaw. 'What shall we talk about?'

'Really,' I said, 'this is too bad; I express neither likings nor dislikings.'

'Precisely: but at this rate, according to your own showing, we shall never be acquainted; and why should I possibly give myself the trouble of calling upon you, or why should you give up time to receive me, except for the purpose of understanding a little about each other?'

'The understanding must come by degrees,' I said,

laughing; 'it is not my way to rush into intimacies or friendships—scarcely into acquaintances.'

'Thank you. Now I have learnt something: your social digestion is slow; I believe mine is too quick. Perhaps that is the reason why so many people ultimately disagree with me—meaning by disagreement, what Sydney Smith meant when he hoped the missionary would disagree with the New Zealand cannibal.'

'Are the "many people" in this neighbourhood?' I asked, with some curiosity.

'Oh, fie! that is bringing us back to gossip, and slander, and evil-speaking. The people in this neighbourhood are just as good as the people in any other neighbourhood; and I like them just as much as I do the rest of my fellow-creatures; which is, to say the truth'——

'Not at all,' I added.

'Exactly so. Long acquaintance with human beings—myself included—has brought me to the conclusion that they are great bores. No doubt you are of the same opinion—all sensible people are; so I will just release you from the presence of one of the race, and say good-bye!'

'Must you really go?' I asked.

'Now that is too flattering, at least it would be, only it comes too early in our acquaintance. After three visits you might say, "must you go?" in that pleading voice, and I should perhaps be vain enough to listen and believe; but not to-day. Besides, it is unwise to break the ice and fathom the shallowness of the water beneath all at once. So again, good-bye! only remember that we are to begin our intercourse next time where we left off to-day. Life is too short to admit of always going through the alphabet from A, in order to arrive at Z.'

Before the servant could open the door Mrs. Bradshaw was gone.

And now, what do I think of her? Is she agreeable? Yes, certainly. But is she pleasant to me, personally? No, certainly not, in one way; she makes me feel so very proper; and I hate being made to feel proper. But when she rattles on at that pace what can one do? Rattle in return, some people would say. But I don't know how, and if I did, it is not natural to me, and I can't pretend or affect; I must be myself under all circumstances. It is strange how little, after all, we did talk of our neighbours, or of anything in the way of facts. I doubt whether she even knows that I have any children. I am very tired, but I feel as if I had had a window in my mind opened, and some fresh air admitted.

CHAPTER V.

July 20.—A letter from Mr. Pierce, agreeing to take Charley. He is to go the first week in August. It is a kind of preparatory school for Winchester. Agnes is half broken-hearted at the idea of parting with him; and she is, I suspect, alarmed at the idea of the two elder sisters coming this afternoon. She has been so much to me now for so long that she cannot face the possibility of my attention being drawn off to others. Jealousy, in her case, is absurd, if she did but know it, dear child; and, perhaps, it is not really jealousy which she feels, but only the uncomfortableness of being put out of place—being no longer eldest and chief. I see her looking sad, and yet do not like to ask what is the matter, for fear of forcing her to put into shape the half-formed misgivings which, if left as they are, may soon melt away. I had so many of those fancies when I was a child myself, and I am sure I was the better for not having anyone to tell them to. Now, of course, it is different, and when shadows come across me, I make a point of examining what it is which causes them, so that I may the better fight against them. But at nine years old all definite forms are magnified, and therefore it is often wiser to leave them indefinite. The only way in which I can help my little pet is, by putting the responsibility of her sisters' comfort upon her, instead of taking it entirely upon myself. Give her an interest in working for them, and she will soon cease to be jealous. So I have professed to be very busy this morning with letters

(which is really the case), and have sent her upstairs to see that her sisters' room is comfortable, and then she and Charley are to gather flowers for the vases on the dressing-table. Charley is quite excited, and already fancies himself the grown-up brother who is to be Ina and Cecil's protector.

Ten o'clock P.M.—The two girls have arrived. They travelled together to Westford, and Agnes and I took a fly and met them at the station. It is too late to note any details, only they seem quite bright and happy, and are well pleased with everything, especially with Agnes' flowers, which won the little woman's heart, though she sidled up to me at the station, and said, almost with tears in her eyes, 'Mamma, they are such young ladies!'

If she did but know how thankful I am at the bottom of my heart that, in one sense, they are young ladies; that I have not to fight against roughness and *gaucherie* and awkward tricks! School has done good as regards externals, at any rate; I hope it may have done more. Ina's gratitude about the room was quite graceful; everything she does is graceful. Cecil only looked at me, and said, 'You must have thought a great deal about us!' but she crept close to me, and put her hand within mine, and was silent for some seconds, and then she ran off and showed herself almost as much a child as Agnes.

July 21.—I must note the conversation which passed between the two girls and myself this morning. I think I may learn something from it.

We met at prayers at half-past eight, breakfast was directly afterwards. Cecil left the room when prayers were over, and did not appear till some time after we were all seated. I began pouring out the tea; Ina offered to help me. She was just a little too studied in her way of doing it; a little too much the young lady of the house. Cecil came in and said, brusquely—

'Ina, I can't find my little pebble brooch.'

'Can't you? It is not a very valuable one, so it does not much signify.'

'Yes, but it does. I liked the brooch. Grandmamma gave it me; and besides, I can't afford to buy another.'

'Grandmamma will give you another, I dare say. You have only to write and ask her.'

'I don't like asking anyone for anything,' said Cecil, a little sharply.

'Then, my dear'—the tone was quite that of a patronising elder sister—'you must be contented to go without what you want.'

Cecil sat down with a cloud on her face. I think she would have answered sharply if I had not been present.

Agnes put her little hand upon Cecil's arm, and said in a timid whisper, 'I have a very pretty pebble brooch; I should like you to have it.'

'Thank you.' But Cecil's tone was ungracious, and Agnes drew back repulsed.

'It is very kind of you, Agnes, darling,' said Ina, 'very kind indeed; but Cecil would not like to take your pretty brooch from you.'

'I should like her to have it though,' persisted Agnes, drawing her chair nearer to Ina. 'It is a red brooch, a red pebble, and it came from India. Shall I show it you after breakfast?'

Ina's thanks for this proposal were cordial, and her caressing manner was very winning.

Charley broke in with: 'Mamma, why must people always wear brooches? Why don't they pin themselves together, and there would be an end of it?'

'Yes, there would be an end of it, Charley; rather an unpleasant one,' said Ina; 'we should tumble to pieces.'

'And you would be all in bits, and there would be no more need of brooches,' said Charley, pleased at his

fancied wit. And then Agnes laughed, and Ina laughed too; but Cecil's face did not clear.

I felt there was something behind, and when breakfast was finished, I took Cecil aside, and asked her a little more about the brooch. Then she told me that it was one her grandmamma valued, because it had belonged to aunt Kate, who was dead, and it had been given to aunt Kate by uncle Henry, who was in Australia. It had a curious mark across it, which uncle Henry had made himself. 'Of course,' added Cecil, 'I should not like to tell grandmamma I had lost it, and ask for another. It is very well for Ina to talk. Ina takes everything so easily; but I wish very much I could find the brooch.'

I wished so too very much, but I wished still more that there was no such association with uncle Henry in Australia. Not that it signifies now, but it just keeps up a certain kind of interest, which would be better dropped. Mrs. Penryhn was devoted to this son, I fancy, and never would see his faults.

Ina was taken possession of by Agnes, and was being carried off to the schoolroom, when I called her back, and asked her to go upstairs at once with Cecil, and search for the brooch, because it was a pity her sister should be worried about it, though it did seem a trifle.

I expected a little look of impatience; but no, Ina was unruffled, quite ready to go and hunt for the brooch, and having no doubt they should find it. It was almost certain to be there somewhere. Cecil was famed for losing her things, or hiding them away and forgetting them.

They came back again almost directly; the brooch was found, it was under a book which Cecil had been reading. I asked if she was in the habit of reading whilst she was dressing; and she said, 'not exactly—that is, she was learning poetry.'

'Cecil dotes upon poetry,' observed Ina; but Cecil

herself made no such assertion, only blushed, and said that they learnt a great deal of poetry at school.

‘And I hope you will learn a great deal of poetry at home,’ I replied. ‘There is more use in it than you will understand till you are as old as I am.’

‘You are not very old, mamma,’ said Cecil, quickly.

‘Not very, but old enough to feel that I wish I had learnt a great deal more than I did when I was your age, and had nothing else to think of.’

‘I mean to make so much use of my time now,’ said Ina, ‘till I am seventeen.’

‘Why must people—girls I mean—leave off learning when they are seventeen?’ asked Cecil.

‘You must ask someone else, my dear,’ I said; ‘I don’t know, and I never yet found anyone who could tell me.’

Ina was evidently puzzled. ‘But, mamma, girls come out at seventeen.’

‘Yes, generally.’

‘And then, of course, they don’t do lessons.’

‘Of course not, because there is no time.’

‘And they must come out.’

‘Must? Yes, I suppose they must; at least they think so.’

‘But they really must. They can’t help it. It is right,’ said Cecil, eagerly, yet in a tone which implied doubt.

‘Well; that touches upon a difficult subject. If we live till this time next year we will discuss it. Now, suppose you go upstairs and unpack your boxes, whilst I have the little ones with me and order dinner, and then we will see how you can be most comfortably settled in the schoolroom.’

‘Do you call it the schoolroom?’ said Ina, stopping as she was going away, ‘I should like it to be the study.’

‘I should not!’ exclaimed Cecil. ‘Study is grand, and we are used to schoolroom.’

‘Yes, used at school,’ replied Ina; ‘but we are going to forget school.’

‘I don’t want to forget it,’ said Cecil: ‘Mrs. Harrison was very kind to me, and I was very happy there.’

‘Still this is not school; and the room need not be the schoolroom, need it, mamma?’ persisted Ina.

‘It is quite immaterial, my dear; Agnes and I generally call it the schoolroom, because it is fitted up like one.’

‘But it will be a study, because we are going to study in it,’ continued Ina.

‘As you like, my love, so long as you do study.’

‘Then it is the study!’ exclaimed Ina, triumphantly; and she ran off, followed by Cecil, and I sat down to think.

July 27.—Such a busy week this has been, and a perplexing one! Every lesson and duty required a place to be found for it. It was much worse than putting a house in order; and the places appointed beforehand, and in my own mind, did not all suit, and there was a consequent confusion in my thoughts between what I had intended to do, and what I found I could do. That mental disorderliness is the most trying of all kinds of perplexity. I began by mapping out the great works which must be done, and then fitting the small works into the interstices. Excellent discipline this for such an unpunctual, unmethodical person as I am by nature. We breakfast at half-past eight; eight would be more virtuous, but I know I should never achieve it constantly, and I want time to myself before the day’s business begins. I attend to household matters directly after breakfast, and go into the schoolroom for Scripture-reading at a quarter to ten. We read the second morning lesson and a small portion of the old Testament history, and I give any geographical

or historical information which occurs to me, so as to make it interesting : anything like preaching I carefully avoid, but I find that the two girls accept very pleasantly hints as to daily conduct, or explanations of moral difficulties. They have been accustomed to be down by seven. I say now half-past seven, because they are likely to be later at night. They have work to do for me both before and after breakfast till I am ready to read. I stay in the schoolroom from ten till twelve, working chiefly with the elder girls, but I manage to hear Essie do her baby lessons in the intervals of time. Agnes and Hugh do a few things by themselves and then come to me from twelve till one. Charley studies his Latin grammar ; but as he is so soon going to school, lessons are just now, in his case, a secondary consideration. The little ones have an hour's play in the morning. The two elder girls profess to think it very hard to be forced to go into the garden for half an hour before dinner, which is at half-past one. During this dry warm weather, it is impossible to walk in the afternoon, so we sit out of doors and read some steady book, and the children finish any lessons they may have to do, till about five o'clock, when we have a cup of tea and some biscuits in the summer-house, and walk afterwards : of course the tiny children have their regular tea in the nursery then, Agnes included ; but Ina and Cecil and I have a heavy tea when we come home. It is the pleasantest meal in the day, and my best opportunity for really knowing them ; for when the little ones are present at dinner, half one's business is to teach them to hold their knives and forks properly, and sensible conversation is often interrupted. I suspect the dinner-hour is rather a trial to the two girls, but they are very good about it. As autumn comes on, these hours must be somewhat altered ; we must walk in the afternoon, and do lessons afterwards, but the

divisions of the day will be much the same. It is a very pleasant life ; the only drawback to myself personally is the necessity of raising others to my own level, instead of resting in the sense of equality. Ina and Cecil are as pleasant and docile as possible, but the school tone has not been without its effect upon them. I find that lessons are in their eyes always lessons, and cannot be anything else. I have not fought against the idea in words ; they would not understand me, and if they professed to accept my view without understanding it they would be unreal : but I try to work it out of them by the influence of my own mind. They are just well-drilled machines as regards intellect, and nothing more. They can receive, and digest, and bring out, in a set form, any amount of information, and would pass an excellent examination, but they have no idea of working out anything original from the materials which are given them. All that they have learnt is dried and classified, but there is no vitality in it, and, as it is, it will never produce any fruit worthy of the name. I can scarcely give any instance of this : it is the spirit which pervades all they have learnt or do learn. They have no idea of connecting the past and the present. It seemed quite a new light to them, the other day, when I took a leading article of the 'Times,' which had reference to bygone Italian history, and read it to them, and then made them see how the brigandage of Naples, which they had just heard of in a letter from a schoolfellow, who is abroad, was indirectly connected with the great struggle between the temporal and spiritual power in Italy, which has been going on for so many centuries. They both grew excited upon the subject, much to my satisfaction, and as they professed to be very ignorant of the history of Naples, I have allowed them to take that particular subject, and work it out for themselves, searching out the

facts from various books, and writing them down for me connectedly, instead of their usual composition lesson. This is the first great innovation I have made in their school routine. At first I thought it best to adopt it as well as I could, so as to give them an idea of continuity. The worst of a frequent change of instructors is that it tends to lessen respect, and make children criticise those who teach them. As to accomplishments, we shall manage very fairly well. Drawing I can undertake myself. Cecil has a taste for it, but not Ina. Her talent is music; she plays even now remarkably well, and with a great deal of feeling; and her voice will, I suspect, be a most charming contralto. I question whether Cecil will ever sing. She has no strength of voice, though she looks so much the more robust of the two. I have engaged Madame Dupin, from Westford, to give them both music lessons twice a week. She teaches and plays beautifully. It is curious to watch the effect of the French name. The two girls would not have thought half so much of Madame Dupin if she had been Mrs. Brown. That is a school tradition, school being the epitome of the world; and the world always valuing most highly that which it least understands.

All this time Hugh continues his little lessons, and Agnes and I plod on, and I hope make progress, though it is chiefly in the way of being quite perfect in the multiplication table, and having a fair knowledge of the general outlines of English and the beginning of Roman history. Hers is a curiously thoughtful mind, and her feelings are so keen and deep, I tremble sometimes when I think what the consequence would be if she had any great or lingering trial to bear. Even her extreme conscientiousness is in some ways a drawback: it tends to over-scrupulousness. She would always, if left to herself, exaggerate a

claim of duty. There is, I think, some want of proportion in her character. Even now it a little interferes with her usefulness. She is so trustworthy that I could often leave her to look after Hugh and Essie, but she makes herself so unhappy if anything goes wrong, that I feel it is almost too great a strain upon her.

CHAPTER VI.

August 3.—Charley went off this morning. The house has been a complete blank all day. I don't think any of us knew how we should miss him. As for Agnes, she is quite a little widow in her loneliness. The last kiss between the two went to my heart; there was such a world of sorrow in it. And then the little fellow flung himself into my arms, and just managed to say good-bye, but that was all; one word more, and he would have broken down, and so should I. I did not say, 'It won't be long to Christmas,' for I felt that it would be very long. He is to go to London under the care of the guard, and Mr. Pierce is to meet him there. Mr. Grey assures me it is all safe, and I try and think so. I must make a man of him early, for his sisters' sake as well as his own. That has been the chief event of the day. Another, which must, however, be noted, is a first introduction to the rector. He has only just returned: we met accidentally; I had been calling at the Manor, and Mrs. Bradshaw joined me as I came out of the lodge-gate. The rector appeared from the school-house on the opposite side of the road. There was the usual introduction—Mrs. Anstruther, Mr. L'Estrange; Mr. L'Estrange, Mrs. Anstruther—and we both bowed, and took in each other at a glance; at least I know I did. So much of my comfort must depend upon the clergyman of the parish, that I greatly desired to know what he was like. Very tall and bronzed, age about forty, I should imagine,

—handsome features, a narrow brow, keen eyes, a determined mouth. I think I shall respect him, though possibly I may not like him. Mrs. Bradshaw accosted him with—

‘Your parish will be glad to see you back, Mr. L’Estrange. I should be glad too, if I were ever benefited by your society.’

‘I beg your pardon,’ was the grave answer, ‘I think I had the pleasure of dining with you only a week before I left home.’

‘It might have been a pleasure to you, I hope it was, but it was none at all to me. The weather was tremendously hot, and there were too many at table, and my cook was ill, and the dinner in consequence was very badly dressed. I never recollect a more disagreeable dinner party myself. But as you say you liked it, of course you did.’

‘I think all that I said was that I had the pleasure of dining with you,’ replied the rector, still rigidly grave; ‘I am not aware that I made any mention of my peculiar feelings. Pleasure is a conventional word.’

‘Meant to conceal dis-pleasure,’ interrupted the incorrigible Mrs. Bradshaw. ‘Yes, I comprehend now; I am to take you by contraries.’

‘Not in the least: pray understand me.’

‘My good friend, you must give me additional brains if I am to do that. If pleasure does not mean pleasure, pray what does it mean? Is it a fit of the toothache?’

‘Mrs. Bradshaw amuses herself at the expense of her less-gifted neighbours,’ said the rector, turning to me, whilst the muscles of his mouth relaxed as from a sense of stern duty. ‘I trust I may find Mrs. Anstruther more willing to lower herself to the level of an ordinary mind.’

‘Oh, fie! The rector of a parish pleading guilty to an ordinary mind!’ exclaimed Mrs. Bradshaw. ‘I hope

the little boys are not listening behind the hedge. But, perhaps'—she stopped. 'I won't say what I was going to say; it was naughty, and you would lecture me next Sunday in your sermon, and then we should quarrel; for I don't like being preached at, any more than you like my dinner parties.'

'But, indeed——.'

The poor rector was again in an agony of explanation.

'Don't trouble yourself to explain; there is not the least necessity. I know all you would say, and I quite agree. Dinner parties are the dullest of all dull things, and nothing will ever make them better. Mrs. Anstruther is not in the least shocked at you. If she had been present she would have said just the same.'

'But, indeed—I never—you quite mistake—I assure you——.'

The unfortunate rector coloured up to his temples. Mrs. Bradshaw kept an unchanged countenance.

'I had something to say, Mr. L'Estrange, about my gardener's boy; but it is rather too long a story for the present. When am I likely to see you again?'

'I will do myself the honour of calling, if you will name the day and the hour,' said the rector, evidently feeling his own rectorial self again as soon as parish affairs were mentioned.

'To-morrow, three o'clock—will that be convenient?'

'Quite convenient. Good morning!' And lifting his hat to us with the courtly politeness of fifty years ago, the rector stalked away.

'The most excellent man living,' said Mrs. Bradshaw; 'also the stiffest. It is one of the chief delights of my vegetative existence to turn him round mentally three times, and then ask him where he is. He will be miserable for the next week, because I made him think he had made a rude speech.'

‘He must be vastly stupid,’ I said, ‘not to know his own words.’

‘Do you really think so?’ and Mrs. Bradshaw stopped and fixed her keen eyes full upon me. ‘That shows me you have never been in a witness-box, or seen anyone else there. Let the rector be placed in it, and I venture to say he would convict himself of any unimaginable falsehoods you might choose to invent for him, and go away fully believing he had spoken them, and anxious to do penance for them.’

‘I doubt it,’ I said; ‘he has too clever a forehead to be easily confused.’

‘Clever, but narrow. Put him on—as schoolboys say—upon any subject which he really understands, and you will find him digging so deep that you run the risk of being buried in trying to grope after him, and soaring so high that you lose yourself in the clouds in trying to follow him. But strive to expand him, send him forth across the wide fields of common sense, and you may lead him astray in an instant. He can preach a splendid funeral sermon; but I once heard him return thanks for the bridesmaids at a wedding breakfast, and it was a treat for “Punch.”’

‘He has no sense of the ludicrous, I suppose,’ was my reply.

‘I could scarcely say that. He does make a joke sometimes, in his own queer fashion, looking all the time as shy as a girl of fifteen when a man pays her a compliment; and drawing down the corners of his mouth penitentially afterwards. But, in fact, it is no use to attempt to say what he is like. He is one of those exceptional beings who must be learnt. In my own mind I always think of him as belonging to a race once described to me by a young Roman Catholic friend of mine as “not exactly.”’

‘Not exactly!’ I repeated. ‘What can that mean?’

‘Just what I say. This young friend was brought up in a convent, and she was guilty of some misdemeanour, and was called upon to confess it. She was asked who was the person against whom the offence was committed. One of her companions? No. One of the nuns? No. Was it a woman? No. Was it a man? Not exactly. It turned out to be her confessor. Don’t you see now what I mean, when I say that our good friend is “not exactly?”’

I could not help laughing, but I was silent.

‘Cautious as usual; but you laugh, so I know you understand and agree. And I am not by any means as irreverent as you imagine. The rector stands upon a pedestal, though it is a little rickety, and I feel convinced that there is only one thing which will ever make it firm.’

‘A wife?’ I said.

‘Delightful! We are sworn friends from this moment. Yes, he wants a wife; and if I could only get him one, just to my taste—no matter for his—his name would be sent to Rome for canonisation by the next post.’

‘Is he aware of your kind interest in his welfare?’ I asked. I suspect my tone was a little anxious, for I had been somewhat startled by this open avowal of matrimonial intentions.

‘Oh yes, he knows it. I tell him of it whenever we meet alone. I should have attacked him to-day if you had not been present. He starts away from the subject like a shying horse; and I suspect he lives in daily fear of finding himself changed unawares into a married Benedict by my reading the marriage service over him, and some woman brought in from the wilds; just as the poor creatures in the “Arabian Nights” were changed into owls by the magic word of wicked enchantresses.’

‘I don’t wonder at his alarm,’ I said. ‘I should be alarmed too if I were in his place; and,’ I added, half gravely, ‘I can’t undertake to be a sworn friend of yours if you are a manœuvrer.’

A most curious and striking change came over Mrs. Bradshaw. It was as when the bubbles burst, and the froth of champagne evaporates, and only the rich wine remains.

‘You are quite in earnest when you say that,’ she replied; ‘so am I when I tell you I hate manœuvring from the very bottom of my heart. If I did manœuvre it would not be by laughing at the rector, and telling him I wish I could get him a wife. But I will describe to you what I think she must be like. She must be quite young, very pretty, very merry, very caressing, a little wilful on the surface, just to rout him out of some of his odd ways; very obedient *au fond*, in order that he may make her as good as himself. If your Cecil was only ten years older she would be just the person for him; but being as she is, I hope he may find her counterpart in other respects elsewhere. But I don’t expect it. Now you have learnt the extent of my wishes, and certainly of my efforts; for I would sooner put my hand into the fire and have it burnt off, than take upon myself the responsibility of tempting anyone to marriage, except in the abstract.’

‘We shook hands heartily. I thoroughly believe her; and what is more a great deal, I begin to believe in her.’

August 12.—A letter from Charley; the fourth we have had. This last has been longer delayed; a sign that he is happier. The first letters were grievous, and I felt once or twice as if I must rush off to London and bring him back; but he is falling into work now, and will do very well, if the boys do not bully him. I suppose one ought not to judge boys so harshly as one is apt to do, for

what seems to be their cruel nature. Some one said to me the other day, that the real thing to fear as regards boys' cruelty, is not the cruelty of ten, or twelve, or even of thirteen or fourteen years of age, for most times that is mere ignorance. Boys have no notion of the pain they inflict because they suffer so little themselves; and a cruel boy will not necessarily be a bad man. But cruelty at nineteen or twenty is very alarming, and shows a depraved nature. The idea rather comforted me, when I saw Hugh just now catching a fly, and preparing to pull off its wings with the greatest nonchalance, Esther hurrying up to him to watch the process. But, of course, it was stopped, and Hugh was spoken to sharply, and received a little pat on the hand. I thought that better than a dissertation upon natural history, or an appeal to what his own feelings would be if he had his arms and legs pulled off—an operation which to him would appear to be perfectly painless. I find there are a good many things in morals which, like the Latin declensions, must be taught first and explained afterwards.

The schoolroom lessons are going on well. Ina and Cecil have each a register, such as I have used for some time with Agnes; so they know what they have to do; and I give them marks for each lesson, which are to be reckoned according to a certain value, and they are, by-and-by, to have for them any book which they fancy. Ina begs hers may be a Shakespeare. Cecil is not quite so ambitious, but desires rather some work on natural history, which she has a taste for. I wish I knew more about it, that I might encourage her; but I let her collect specimens, and am merciful to the dirt which they bring with them, so far at least that I have assigned her a little closet inside the housekeeper's room, in which she may arrange and keep them, though I will not have the schoolroom upset by them. Till I did this, the seaweed,

and shells, and dried flowers, with now and then a stray insect, were the source of a constant feud between her and Ina, who is remarkably neat and delicate in all her ways, and could not at all understand Cecil's disorderliness. Agnes, too, was worried; for before her sisters came, it was her pride to have the schoolroom a pattern of neatness. Sympathy on this point has drawn her nearer to Ina than to Cecil; and there is something in Ina's grace and beauty, and her marvellously sweet voice, which I am sure attracts her unconsciously. It is difficult not to be attracted by it.

I see the influence in various ways; some that might make me a little jealous if I were of a jealous nature, which I am thankful (I hope humbly thankful) to say I am not. Agnes used to be always at my beck and call; always anxious for a walk with me; always telling me her little wishes. Now a great deal of this confidence and interest goes to Ina; but I look on amused, and in one sense pleased. It is, of all things, important that the sisters should understand and love each other; and after all I am the point from which their affections radiate. They may disport themselves, as it were, for a time with their young fancies, but the more they do it the more they will become aware that it is my affection which really unites and makes them one. I hope I should feel the same if these feelings were developing themselves out of the family; but perhaps it would be more difficult then; though I dread jealousy as the cankerworm of all true honourable love.

CHAPTER VII.

August 14.—The Woodleigh family are returned, so nurse tells me. She is rather a purveyor of gossip, which worries me, for I don't know how to stop it, and I am so afraid of it for the children, though I have never found out that she tells them anything which they really ought not to hear. If I were to do so I should part with her instantly.

She said to me this morning, 'Mrs. Randolph, ma'am, and the little boy, and a young lady, who has been here before with them, a niece, I believe, came last night. They were to have been here by an earlier train, but they managed to be late for it. Mr. Randolph is not come. He is in London. People think, ma'am, that it is strange he is down here so little, and they say very unpleasant things of Mrs. Randolph.'

'Thank you, nurse, that will do.' She was fastening my dress. Perhaps she took the hint, for she went away without another word. But it is singular that everyone speaks in this doubtful tone of Mrs. Randolph.

August 15.—I was talking to our new gardener, Stephen Bright, this afternoon,—or rather evening, for it was nearly six o'clock,—giving directions about moving some plants, when I heard a sound of loud voices in the kitchen-garden; strange tones, and, as it seemed to me, angry. I thought I distinguished Cecil's. Presently there followed a thundering knocking at some door. Stephen stopped in his work and listened.

'Rather rampageous! ma'am. Shall I go and see?'

But I thought that was delegating my duties, and I hurried off myself.

The noise came from the closed gate leading into the Woodleigh grounds. Some one on the other side was knocking at it—more than knocking indeed—for it was a regular case of assault and battery. Cecil was screaming at the pitch of her voice, ‘This is our garden! we don’t let anyone in!’ and a rough boy’s answer was shouted from the other side, ‘You’ve no business to lock it; we always come in, and we will!’ and then followed more knocking and rattling of the door, and a stone was thrown against it. I went up to Cecil unperceived, and laid my hand upon her arm. She started, and began an instant explanation, but I put up my finger for silence, and then whispered to her to run indoors and fetch the key which was hanging up in the closet outside my room. I said not a word whilst she was gone, and the assault went on for a few seconds. Presently I heard another voice expostulating with the boy, commanding first, then entreating, at last imploring. I walked away, for I did not wish to overhear the conversation, and directly afterwards Cecil brought the key. I waited till she had run back to the house, and then unlocked the door, and confronted a lady, rather young-looking, very tall and slight, dressed in a picturesque fashion, essentially un-English,—a black bodice, white sleeves, and a blue skirt of very rich figured silk. Her dark hair was turned back from her forehead, and gathered behind into a kind of white net or cap, studded with spangles. I have seen something of the kind in Bavaria. Her face was very pleasing, though I could not call it regularly handsome. The outline was oval, the forehead rather low; the eyes very bright, but wanting in depth; the mouth was very large, but the expression was sweet, and the teeth were exquisitely

white and regular. That which struck me in the countenance was the look of restlessness and excitability. By her side was a wonderfully handsome boy, of about eight or nine, evidently wilful and determined; passion and self-indulgence expressed in the full lips, and pride showing itself in the turn of the head, and the contemptuous curl of the nostril.

The lady was holding his hand. She dropped it when I appeared in the doorway, and we looked at each other for an instant in silence.

The boy exclaimed, 'I thought you were a girl; you screamed like one!'

'Hush! Victor, Hush! run away. You must forgive him;' and the lady appealed to me.

'I will go through,' said the boy, endeavouring to push by me.

'I beg your pardon,' was my reply, and I placed myself in the doorway. 'No one enters this garden without my leave.'

'Are you Mrs. Anstruther?' asked the boy more gently.

'Yes, I am Mrs. Anstruther; and I invite you to come into the garden now; but I intend to lock the door again, and it will not be reopened. Perhaps Mrs. Randolph will come with you,' I added. 'I believe I have the pleasure of speaking to her.'

It was a gentle refined voice which answered, 'You are very good and forbearing; but my boy is not always so rude, it is only when he is opposed; and the cottage has been so long unlet, he has quite taken it for his own. But you will excuse him I know, and we shall be friends, I trust.'

I am afraid my bow of assent was a little cold. I always hate myself for being cold to strangers; but how can I help it? It is quite impossible for me to fall into

friendship at first sight. And then the black bodice, and the spangled cap, and the very rude boy! What was I to do?

We walked round the cottage garden together. Mrs. Randolph was lavish in her admiration of the improvements. Everything was so very charming. The cottage had always been lovely, now it was a little Paradise. I could not avoid asking her into the house. Ina, Cecil, and Agnes were in the drawing-room.

'Your children? I have heard of them,' said Mrs. Randolph, 'I think I know them apart. This is Ina, is it not? And this is Cecil?' And she gently touched the two girls. Seeing my surprise she went on: 'I was a friend of their aunt's, her dearest friend indeed; but they won't remember aunt Kate,—dear Katharine Penrhyn!'

'I don't remember her,' said Ina, 'but grandmamma always talks about her, and she has never recovered her death.'

'No wonder; she was such a sweet creature, so bright and beautiful. This dear girl reminds me very much of her,' continued Mrs. Randolph, looking at Ina, but addressing herself to me, 'though Cecil is rather like her in the expression of the eye.'

I glanced at the two girls involuntarily, watching the effect of the remark. Ina raised her head, and was evidently pleased. Cecil turned away, and took up a book.

Mrs. Randolph spoke to Agnes, and asked if she was the only little one.

'There are Charley, and Hugh, and Essie,' said Agnes; 'but Charley is gone to school.'

'What a pity! He would have been a charming play-fellow for my Victor. Where is Victor? My dear boy!'

Victor had perched himself on the top of the music-stool, and was twirling himself round as hard as he could

go. When his mother spoke, he gave the stool one more twist, and, as a consequence, fell with it to the ground.

Then followed a scream, and a rush, and a flood of tears, and applications of water, and eau-de-cologne to a bruised forehead. Mrs. Randolph was, I saw, really disturbed. Her tone lost its rather languid drawl. She was energetic, and sensible, and grateful; and Victor being frightened, was subdued and obedient. They went at last; and I did not let them out again at the private gate, but allowed them to go back by the lane. Was this very rude and ungracious? I hope not. But the dearest friend of aunt Kate! Then of course she is still intimate with the Penryhns. I wish she lived fifty miles off.

Captain Shaw came in almost immediately after Mrs. Randolph was gone. They must have passed each other. His criticism upon Victor amused me vastly. 'A very alarming boy, my dear madam; utterly without law! The mother is a very weak woman. Nearly nine years old, and no notion of discipline! Grievous, grievous!'

'He will be sent to school, I hope, before long,' was my reply.

'I hope so, my dear madam, for his own sake and his mother's; for my sake and yours; for the safety of the country, I hope so. Such materials for the England of the future! Ah! madam, I was born on the outskirts of one revolution, and if God should spare me to be an old man—an aged man I mean—I shall die on the outskirts of another.'

I cared more for Ina and Cecil's impression of Mrs. Randolph, than for Captain Shaw's opinion of Victor; and when we met at tea I gathered what it was.

'Mamma, I don't like Mrs. Randolph,' said Cecil, in her rather blunt way; 'she dresses like a harlequin; and I think she ought to give Victor a good flogging.'

'She does try to keep him in order,' said Ina; 'but a

great boy like that must be too much for such a slight delicate creature to manage. Mamma, how old do you think she is?’

‘About thirty, I should think.’

‘As much as that? I don’t think she looks more than six-and-twenty; and she is so very graceful and picturesque!’

‘It would be all very well if she was a foreigner,’ said Cecil; ‘but it is make-believe to dress in that way, as she is English.’

‘It must be a costume,’ said Ina. ‘Don’t you think, mamma, it is a great pity there are no costumes in England now.’

‘Yes,’ I said, ‘for many reasons I should like them; but that is a very different thing from liking to see them introduced by any particular person. I confess I don’t like Mrs. Randolph’s dress.’

‘But if everyone wore that kind of dress?’ persisted Ina.

‘Then it would cease to be singular, and I should not object to it.’

‘And if no one sets the fashion, no one can follow it,’ continued Ina.

‘Costumes are not fashions, mamma, are they?’ enquired Cecil.

‘Oh yes, they are; they must be,’ interrupted Ina: ‘how could such queer dresses have been invented but for fashion?’

‘Why don’t they go out, Ina, if they are fashion?’ I asked.

I had no reply. Ina likes to puzzle out a question by herself; she has more mental energy than Cecil; and at length she said—

‘There ought to be a history of costumes.’

‘Yes,’ I replied, ‘just as there ought to be, and will be,

a history of language. I suppose all costumes originally had a meaning.'

'And if Mrs. Randolph's black bodice has a meaning, mamma, you will approve of it?' said Ina.

'Possibly; I won't pledge myself; it depends upon what the meaning is.'

'It means that she does not like English fashions, and that she does like foreign fashions!' exclaimed Cecil. 'Nurse told us she was half a foreigner; and she has brought an Italian niece with her, quite an Italian, who is living with her.'

A fresh light thrown upon Mrs. Randolph's household, still not satisfactory! And I do wish that nurse would not tell the children everything she hears.

Agnes also gave me her idea of Mrs. Randolph when I went up to the nursery to be with the little ones as they were going to bed.

'Mamma, that was a very strange lady.

'Rather strange, darling.'

'Mamma, is she a lady?'

'Yes: why should you think she is not?'

'Do ladies dress themselves up to be stared at?'

I kissed my little pet, and answered, 'I am afraid sometimes they do.' And then I felt as if I had condemned poor Mrs. Randolph utterly, and tried to put in a little morality about not judging one's neighbour. But I suspect Agnes was right. It is the idea of dressing up to be stared at which is so distasteful, and which one cannot avoid.

CHAPTER VIII.

September 3.—I should like to know what impression the two girls are receiving from this life. It is very regular and unexciting. They seem happy, and have fitted into my ways very well. But it is surface work. There is no depth in the 'Mamma' as yet. I feel the difference between their love and Agnes' acutely. I ought not to expect more, because, in one sense, I suppose I do not give more; but in another sense, I do give them a very great deal. I cannot measure, and weigh, and analyse my feelings; but certainly Ina and Cecil are quite as engrossing to me, as objects of interest, and anxiety, and responsibility, as my own children; and such a rush of tenderness comes over me when I think of the past, and their father, and all I have pledged myself to be to them, that I sometimes almost fear I may jar upon them by expressing what they cannot return. Oh dear! it is the unreality of the position which tries me; but I must accept it as my portion. I took it with my eyes open, and I am far better off than hundreds similarly placed. There is no antagonism between us; quite the contrary. I am sure Ina really thinks she is very fond of me, and Cecil is becoming so attentive to me in little ways, that I feel there must be a deeper feeling underneath. I must be patient. Impatience is one of my besetting sins, I have lately discovered. How can we be to each other as parent and children when we have not been together two months? I should be less anxious, I think, if I did not feel how much depends upon me in a religious sense; I

mean as to making them religious, or, rather, opening the door for the working of a higher power. If I am to influence them at all upon such a subject, it must be by affection; and if the affection should be of slow growth, I am afraid the religious principle will be so too; and till there is that as a foundation, the character rests upon sand.

Agnes is not yet ten years old, and yet I am convinced there is much more care for religion in her than in the two elder girls. I can see it in the way she behaves in church, and reads the Bible, and repeats the Sunday lessons; and especially in the questions she asks me—questions which imply real interest and thought. Ina and Cecil have, as it were, got up their religion by heart. At school they did catechism, as they call it; that is, they found out a certain number of references, and repeated a certain number of texts, and were made to write out types and prophecies; but I cannot find that any impression has been left upon their minds by this work. They sat up in a gallery in church, and from things which came out every now and then, I suspect they amused themselves a good deal by looking down upon the congregation and making remarks upon dress. Upon this they have engrafted a taste for externals in religion, gathered chiefly from the gossip of other girls. They are saving up their money to buy prayer-books with crosses; and Ina is working part of a border for an altar-cloth, which is to be a gift to a new church from one of her school friends. As to doctrine, as far as I can make out, it is mainly negative. Anything which they have ever heard called Low Church is and must be wrong—utterly wrong; there cannot be a particle of good in it. Beyond this I doubt if they ever go.

As I write all this I seem to be tacitly condemning the children—making them out to be cold and unreal. I

know quite well that I should give this impression to anyone who read what I have written. But it would be a very unfair one: I never met with two girls of whom I think more might be made ultimately; but they have a varnish over them; Ina has especially: she has heard of what will be said, and what will be thought, and what other people do, till she really has very little idea of what she thinks and feels herself. And till I can get at this, and make her get at it also, she never will be really worth anything. Cecil is much more unformed; that has been her safeguard. She copies Ina, but it is merely from habit. One conclusion I have come to is, that it is no use—that it will do more harm than good—to talk religion to them directly, till they have learnt what it means. That is to say, it will do no good to bring before them the need of repentance till they have discovered what they are to repent of. Just now their standard of goodness is so easy of attainment, that it would be a miracle if they felt anything like genuine sorrow for shortcomings. They are not aware, in fact, that there are any shortcomings. I am not surprised at this, though, naturally enough, I am pained. I suppose it is no one's fault in particular; the Penrhyn tone is, I imagine, essentially worldly, and Arling has been their only home; and at school they have just been put into a mill and ground into the shape which the world chooses to accept. How could they be different, poor children? All this makes me feel more and more the importance of giving children a high standard from infancy. Hugh finished his little catechism lesson yesterday by saying, 'Mamma, I want to be very good, as good as Jesus Christ.' An impossibility. But what could my darling have said better?

CHAPTER IX.

September 6.—We were on the beach this afternoon—the three elder girls and myself. I sat down on a stone, whilst they clambered about on the rocks. Presently I saw, coming down the path by the cliff, Mrs. Randolph and a young girl; Victor lingering behind, throwing stones into the sea. Mrs. Randolph and I had not met since our first introduction. I returned her visit, but she was out. My unsociable impulse was to walk on and avoid her, but I felt it would be rude, and I was just a little curious, too, to see more of her. She was not singular in her costume to-day, only in the height of the fashion. I looked at her so intently at first that I scarcely remarked her companion. When I did, I saw at once that she must be the young Italian girl of whom the children had spoken. Her appearance was unmistakably foreign; the face, oval in its contour, was really beautiful, though it might be open to criticism; the forehead was prominent; the nose perhaps a little too large; the mouth indicating strength of character and yet great sweetness; the eyes very dark, brilliant with intelligence, and yet with a strange mournfulness and depth in them, which formed a great contrast to the lightness of expression in Mrs. Randolph's countenance. She was introduced to me by Mrs. Randolph as 'my niece Marietta.' The bend which followed was reverently shrinking and timid, and this was all I could tell for the first two or three minutes; for not a word escaped Marietta's lips except 'so pleasant!' 'so sweet!' almost an echo of Mrs. Randolph's. Presently, however, Ina appeared

round the point which had hidden her and the others from view, and then, to my extreme surprise, Marietta started up, rushed forward, caught both Ina's hands, and I heard her exclaim '*Carissima! ah, che piacere!*' to which Ina appeared to respond somewhat awkwardly. I turned to Mrs. Randolph for an explanation.

'Has your niece met my daughter before?' I asked.

'Oh yes, certainly; I think so, at least. Marietta said something about pleasant little walks; I did not take much notice at the time.'

Mrs. Randolph sank back languidly on the bench; the meeting was to her quite unimportant: not at all so to me.

'I beg your pardon,' I said, 'but I don't exactly understand. Little walks? Do you mean here or elsewhere?'

'Oh here, of course; they could not have met elsewhere. Marietta has been travelling with me for the last three months. You don't object, I hope?'

The question showed that my countenance must have expressed more than I intended, for really I had tried to smile. Happily, before I could answer, Marietta and Ina came up. Cecil remained behind looking at them, as it seemed, in wonder, and not knowing what was expected of her.

Ina spoke at once in explanation; her voice was just a little husky and nervous, and she did not look me in the face.

'Mamma, Marietta and I have met before in the garden; I meant to have told you about it, but I forgot.'

'Signora, is it a fault?' said Marietta. 'Oh, you will forgive!'

I thought I saw tears in her eyes, but they were eager now rather than mournful.

'No fault, my dear, as regards your walking together,' was my reply; 'only a fault because I did not know it.'

'I assure you,—indeed,'—interrupted Mrs. Randolph,

‘I was not prepared to find my niece’s society rejected. Marietta’—and she stood up—‘we will go!’

There was a flash in Mrs. Randolph’s eye which showed me that she could be extremely passionate, and I felt very uncomfortable.

Marietta turned to her aunt with an air of singular dignity.

‘It is not rejection—no one means that: but they wish to understand. Signora, I will tell you—*Cara zia*’—and she laid her hand respectfully yet somewhat authoritatively upon Mrs. Randolph’s arm; ‘you are angry, but you must wait and hear. I was walking before breakfast; Victor ran about and was naughty; he shook the door—the door between the gardens. Then the gardener opened it, and scolded him; and Ina was there, and came up and spoke, and so did I; and we liked each other, and walked up and down in Woodleigh garden till breakfast-time; and the next day Ina came again, and so she has come several times, and we are friends. That is all I have to say, Signora. If it is wrong, it will not be again.’

‘It is not wrong, Marietta!’ exclaimed Mrs. Randolph; ‘it will be an insult for anyone to say that it is.’

‘No one will insult, Carissima. We will all try to do right, and you will wait one moment longer.’

There was again the slight movement of compulsion, and Mrs. Randolph once more yielded, but a spot of indignant red burned on her cheek.

‘A perfectly simple story,’ I said. ‘No one can for a moment blame you, my dear Miss ——.’ I hesitated for the name.

‘Randolph, Marietta Randolph; only Italian by half;’ and Marietta smiled. ‘You are not vexed, I trust? and I do love Ina!’

‘Ina knows what it is which vexes me,’ I said; and the sense of disappointment made me feel perfectly stiff and icy.

Not one word came from Ina. Marietta looked pained and surprised. '*Cara zia*, we can go now,' she said to Mrs. Randolph; and she held out her hand to me with the air of a princess. Mrs. Randolph bowed, Marietta kissed Ina on both cheeks, and they walked away.

Then Ina spoke.

'Mamma, I meant no harm. I did not know it could be wrong; it was just as Marietta said. You had a headache that morning, and we did not breakfast till nine, and I went out into the garden after I had finished my lessons. Victor shook the gate, and Stephen opened it, and I spoke to Marietta because it would have been rude not to have spoken; and we went on talking, and walked together a little while; and Marietta was pleased because she said she was lonely, and she asked me to come again the next day, because they breakfasted so late, and she liked getting up early. And so I said I would manage to be down at seven, and to finish my lessons by eight, and then I should have a spare half-hour. She was so much obliged to me; and it would have seemed unkind not to do it. We did not say a word that all the world might not have heard; and Marietta is not at all different from us in her ways, though she does speak so oddly. She has lived in Italy all her life till just lately; but her father was English, and brought her up very strictly, and she is not a Roman Catholic. And now she is staying with Mrs. Randolph; I don't quite know why, only I am sure she does Mrs. Randolph a great deal of good—she would do anyone good. So, indeed, mamma, I cannot see what harm I have done.'

I really do not remember ever before feeling so perplexed. I could have understood direct untruth, or pride, or temper; but this easy glossing over what was wrong, twisting facts—not exactly dressing them up and exaggerating—but twisting, combining them, so as to form

a pretty picture, the very antipode of reality, negatived for the moment all the rules which I had made for my own guidance with the children. Of course, looking at things in this way, Ina could not possibly arrive at the conclusion that she was wrong.

I accepted her own words, and tried not to show I distrusted them. 'Dear child,' I began—and then Ina sat down on a stone at my feet, and looked up at me as if quite satisfied—'this is all very true as far as it goes; only it does not go far enough. What do you mean when you say that you cannot see what harm you have done? Do you mean that you have not now, and have not had at all, an uncomfortable feeling of something not quite right in this matter?'

'Yes, that is—I don't see why it was wrong,' she replied.

'Scarcely an answer to my question. There is a vast difference, Ina, between *seeing* what is wrong in an action and having a *feeling* that it is not quite right. And if we do not attend to the feeling, we become, sooner or later, incapable of the seeing. So now tell me once more, have you not had all along a feeling, a sense, of something not quite right in this matter?'

'Yes, a little, just at first; but all the world might have heard what we said.'

'You might have conversed like angels; still there would have been the same uneasy feeling. Now, what was the cause of it?'

'I don't quite know; I never thought.'

'That is to say, you did not wish to think, and so you put the question aside.'

'I did think of it sometimes; but then I felt sure we had said nothing which you would disapprove.'

'That I should disapprove? Then it was the thought of me which occasioned the uneasy feeling?'

Ina burst into tears.

‘I don’t want to blame you, my love,’ I said; ‘I want to make you blame yourself. All the time that these secret meetings were going on——.’

‘Oh, mamma! mamma! secret meetings! Indeed the gardener knew of them, and Cecil.’

‘Did Cecil know of them?’

My tone must have been that of great mental disquietude, for it grieved me to my heart to think that Cecil also might be involved in this concealment.

‘Yes, she knew of them; but she did not go with me. She was not always down early enough, and often she was busy in her closet with her shells.’

‘And you told her that you walked every morning with Marietta?’

‘I told her that I had met Marietta; I did not say where. But I think she forgot what I said, for she never talked about it.’

‘And why did you not tell me that you had met Marietta?’ I asked more sternly, though I felt greatly relieved about Cecil.

‘Because——. Oh, mamma! please don’t look so; it frightens me. I don’t know why—at least—I thought—oh! I have been so wrong!’ And Ina hid her face in my lap.

‘Let me hear it all,’ I said. ‘You thought—what? That I should not like you to know Marietta?’

‘Oh no, no!’

‘That I should stop your walking with her?’

‘Yes—no—not entirely.’

‘But what was it? Ina, you must find out for yourself.’

‘It was the gate—the key; I knew I ought not to take it.’

‘Precisely. The gate was locked. You knew I wished it to remain locked. You could not see Marietta without

unlocking it, without taking the key by stealth. All the rest about Marietta's goodness, and your pity for her, and the innocent conversation, has nothing whatever to do with the matter. The first act was wrong. It was disobedient and deceitful; and therefore, all which followed partook of the nature of deceit.'

'I did not mean it; I did not think of it.'

'Dear child, the first thing for us always to consider is, what an action is in itself. It is for God to excuse us (if in His great mercy He will do so), by taking into account that we did not mean, or did not think.'

'But, mamma, mamma—intention!'—

'Goes a great way when we are judging others, a little way when we are judging ourselves; and that because we are so likely to delude ourselves about it. You tell me that you did not intend to deceive, and yet you own that you had an uneasy feeling because you knew you ought not to have taken the key without leave. What was the cause of this feeling?'

'I thought you would be angry,' said Ina.

'But you hoped I should not find out that you had taken the key?'

'Yes, I suppose so,' was the unwilling answer.

'Then you hoped that I should be deceived in the matter; that I should not think you had done what you had done?'

'I would have owned I had taken the key, if there had been any necessity,' persisted Ina.

'That is not the question. You knew I was deceived, and you hoped that I should continue so. Now what is the difference between knowing you deceive a person, and intending to deceive?'

'Oh, mamma! you despise me, and I know I deserve it!' exclaimed Ina. 'But I don't understand; ever since I have been with you things have seemed so different;

little things, I mean, which before I never thought about.'

'That is just what I want to make you feel,' I said; 'I do want things to seem different to you.'

'But all the world is not so particular,' said Ina. 'At school we always thought we might do what we were not actually forbidden.'

'And a good many things which were forbidden, so long as you were not found out?' I added.

'Yes, I suppose so, but we never thought we were deceitful.'

'Because your only idea of deceit was planning to deceive, what you call intention?'

'Yes, there were some who did that, and they were disliked; and some were found out and punished.'

'And because you would not plan, but only practised a little deceit, accidentally as it were, just as it came in your way, you thought you were quite good?'

'Perhaps we did; but I think I knew I was not.'

'And now you are quite sure you are not?' I said, earnestly.

'Yes, quite sure;' and Ina's tone was grave and deep, as coming from the bottom of her heart.

'Well, then, to imprint that thought on your mind, suppose you write a note to Marietta presently, and tell her exactly why you were wrong, and say that you must not meet her again in the garden, but that you hope to do so in some other way. That will be your reparation to me. I need scarcely add that there is a confession to be made to God, for unquestionably you have not been acting rightly in His sight.'

Ina paused for an instant, before she said, 'But we may meet? we may be together sometimes?'

'I think you may sometimes, but I am afraid there may be reasons against your being very intimate.'

Ina's countenance fell.

'You will trust me, dearest?'

'Oh yes; but—you won't say we are not to meet at all.'

'I will say nothing. Only you must trust me.'

Ina kissed me as she had never done before, and we went home.

CHAPTER X.

September 15, Sunday.—Rather an uneasy, uncomfortable day; for Cecil was faint in church, and I was obliged to come out with her. The church was very crowded, and there is no ventilation. The largest window is near Sir John Anson's pew, and he will keep it shut, because he suffers from rheumatism. Ina tells me that Cecil often feels faint in a hot close atmosphere. We walked home, and she lay down on the sofa, and I read to her. The 'thank you, darling mamma; it is so pleasant; and you are so very good to me!' went to my heart with a thrill of unspeakable pleasure. I thought all the congregation were coming after me, for the stir in the church when we went out was quite exciting. The school children turned and whispered, and the sexton looked at Mr. L'Estrange, and Mr. L'Estrange nodded to him; and Sir John drew aside the curtain which still encloses the manorial pew, caught hold of the sexton as he passed, and whispered loudly, 'Ask her if she will have my carriage;' and Mrs. Bradshaw made a sign to know if she should come with me, and Captain Shaw actually walked down the aisle behind us, and making me a profound bow in the porch, said, 'Madam, allow me to proffer my services.' Very good-natured neighbourly people they all are, and I was sorry to disturb them so much; all the more because they had already received one startling interruption in the appearance of Mrs. Randolph, just as Mr. L'Estrange was opening the Bible to read the first lesson. Poor man! I really thought he would never find out his place;

he looked so distressed; for she came up the aisle rustling her dress, and looking about as if she was entering a theatre; and one of the rector's very strong points is reverence. Marietta was with her, and I never saw anyone more evidently uncomfortable. There was really no place for them, for the sexton had put some strangers from Westford into the Woodleigh seat, and I was obliged to open ours, and I believe it was that crowding which made poor Cecil faint. Mrs. Randolph came in to us, but Marietta was obliged to go into Sir John's seat; and I suspect she was infinitely thankful for the shelter of the red curtain. Ina told me directly she came back from church that Marietta had walked home with her. I could see that this was meant as a proof of openness on her part towards me, and therefore took it as it was intended, and made no comment, but the little advance in intimacy is just what I did not desire. After the afternoon service, Mrs. Bradshaw called to ask for Cecil. I remarked upon Mrs. Randolph's appearance in church, and sounded Mrs. Bradshaw as to the reports which nurse had heard; for they had certainly made me uneasy, especially as they are somewhat corroborated by what I see.

Mrs. Bradshaw was, as usual, perfectly outspoken. 'I read your face,' she said, 'this morning, when Mrs. Randolph swept up the aisle. I felt certain that before long I should be called upon to gossip.'

'I am sorry there is anything to gossip about,' I said, and my voice involuntarily became grave.

'How perfect we are! How without spot ourselves! And how ready to jump to conclusions! Forgive me; but I did hope that I had met with one person who could believe that all is not black which looks black.'

'I am very willing to believe it, if you will vouch for it,' I said; 'but I certainly have arrived at the

conclusion that the world looks askance at Mrs. Randolph.'

'Well, yes. I think that is just the word. It does look at her, but it is, as you say, askance; for it is a very virtuous world, my dear, as no doubt you have long ago learnt. And it won't allow anyone to do improper things, except in a proper way. Mrs. Harcourt, who is the most proper woman I know, is very especially scandalised at Mrs. Randolph's dress. She thinks it quite demoralising that any person, professing to be a lady, should wear a black bodice, and white sleeves, and a coloured skirt. As for Miss Harcourt's *décolletée* appearance at a dinner-party, that, you know, is quite another thing, because society sanctions it.'

'But I don't understand,' I said. 'Do you mean that you approve, or admire?'

'Neither the one nor the other. I think Mrs. Randolph one of the most unapprovable, and, in some respects, the most un-admirable woman I ever saw; yet I don't therefore think that she is a reprobate; but only—forgive the strong language—a moral fool.'

'And her husband?'

'Ah! there's the real grievance. It is a miserable business. Those two people loved each other to desperation once, and now they are as wide apart as the poles.'

'Why? How?'

'Who knows? Temper, incompatibility, arbitrary interference on one side, pride and perverseness on the other. Blind Cupid bringing together materials which were not suited. My dear, I begin to think if there is one thing in this world that more wants setting to rights than another, it is marriage.'

'Not a very original idea,' I said.

'What is original? "There is nothing new under the sun." But what is not original to the world *en masse*,

may be so to each individual. And after having watched James Randolph and Julia Stuart's love from its very dawning, I confess it was a revelation to me when I found, after not meeting them for several years, that it had sunk from boiling heat to freezing-point, and was fast descending to zero.'

'And has it been her fault?'

'I am cautious. I never venture upon any opinion in quarrels between husband and wife. Results are enough for me. He lives in London, and she lives at Woodleigh; and that being the case, the kind world will, of course, talk, and, of course, tell lies: that is all I want to say.'

'And is this really all?' I asked.

'Really all. I can vouch most solemnly for that. But when I have gone so far, remember I will not undertake to go further. I believe Mrs. Randolph often gives occasion to the world to speak ill of her. I know that she is, most unfortunately, regardless of appearances. I have had experience that she can be reckless of what she says and does when angry.'

I must have looked very much pained, for Mrs. Bradshaw continued: 'Now I have worried you enough for to-day. You look quite pale; and I can entirely understand what it is to have such a next-door neighbour, especially when there is a gate opening from your garden into hers.'

'I have taken care about that,' I exclaimed; and then I stopped, remembering Ina's misdeeds.

'Yet you will find it difficult to avoid intimacy, or, at least, friendliness; because there is nothing actually to take offence at; only the eccentricity; and really now and then that is amusing.'

'It will not be amusing to me,' I said: 'of all things make-believe eccentricity is the most distasteful to me. And then for the girls!'

‘It is awkward. When I saw your Ina, and that pretty young creature walking back from church together, I felt that an intimacy was growing up which could not please you. And yet I have said what I have very unwillingly. Do you know, I feel a kind of affection for Mrs. Randolph?’

‘Impossible!’ I exclaimed.

‘My dear, that is a piece of virtue for which I respect you, but I don’t sympathise with it. The one thing which is absolutely abhorrent to me, either in man or woman, is untruthfulness. Julia Randolph’s redeeming point is that she is not untrue. In fact, it is that, and that alone, humanly speaking, which has kept her even as straight as she is. In her heart, I believe, she loves her husband still, and would fain be reconciled to him; but she is too proud to seek forgiveness, and too vain to give up the follies which he complains of.’

‘It is no wonder she gets into difficulties, in that case,’ I said.

‘No; and they are serious difficulties. My son, the Colonel (he is coming next week, and I must introduce him to you), always declares I ought to cut her. But men don’t understand. As I tell him, I am nearly sixty years old, and past the infectious age, so I can afford to be charitable.’

Mrs. Bradshaw stood up to go, but I detained her. I felt mystified; uncertain as to what I ought to do or think.

‘I wish,’ I said, ‘that you would be a little clearer in this matter. I am to keep aloof from Mrs. Randolph, but I shall scarce be able to avoid being intimate. I am not to believe what I hear of her, and yet your son thinks you ought to cut her. You can’t approve of her, and yet you have an affection for her.’

‘Exactly so. A shorthand writer could not have taken

it down more correctly. It is one of the most difficult cases I ever came across; and, to make an honest confession, I have mixed myself up in it in a way which I should be sorry any other person did, especially yourself, whom—Well! I like you better than you do me; but you will take to me more by-and-by, when you are quite certain that I am in my right senses.'

'I have no doubt upon that point,' I said; 'but—you must forgive me—I am not so certain that you are not also a little eccentric.'

'Thank you; that is just what I like. You speak out boldly; and you feel that people who live in glass-houses should not throw stones. Now, I will tell you exactly what I think about that. My notion of eccentricity to be avoided, is going out of the beaten track simply for the sake of going; and in that sense I hope and believe I am not eccentric, because I always desire to do as others do, except when there is some principle involved, and then I must do what I think right myself.'

'And are you not eccentric in visiting Mrs. Randolph?' I asked, rather anxiously.

'No. The Dernham world criticises, but it tolerates her. The rector and I are, however, the only persons who are really friendly towards her, except perhaps Captain Shaw, and he cares more for her husband than for herself. The rector goes to Woodleigh, hoping, I have no doubt, worthy man! that he shall one day effect a conversion; but as I have never heard that the conversation reaches beyond the comparative size of the rectory and Woodleigh cabbages, I don't quite see how the conversion is to be managed.'

'And you?'

'Myself! There is the scandal. I see, what is called, a good deal of Mrs. Randolph. I take my work and sit with her in the evening, when I know she is lonely. And

she reads me her private letters, and confides to me her troubles. But I steadily refuse to dine with her when she has friends staying with her.'

'And why not?'

'Because the friends are infinitely more objectionable than herself. And there is her folly. She will have notorieties about her, let them be who they may. She is a worshipper of talent, and so everyone that has, or professes to have, talent, is to be fêted and flattered; and there are musicians, and artists, and actors, and authors, —some good, some bad, only all devoted, as she says, to literature and art. Such a curious *mélange*! They come down for a month at a time, and during that time I never enter her door. But when they are gone—for she has them only by fits and starts—and when, what I call, the dark hour is on her, then I go in and talk nonsense to her.'

'Dear Mrs. Bradshaw,' I said, 'you do that I know upon principle. But just tell me, can you possibly think that you do any good by it?'

'I can't say. I never think. I only know, my dear'—and the grey eyes, usually so bright, grew dim with tears—'when I see a poor creature living on the brink of a precipice, and know that any chance gust may toss her over, why, I can't help standing by her side and holding her hand to keep her up.'

Hugh and Essie just at that moment ran into the room, and Mrs. Bradshaw hurried out of it.

CHAPTER XI.

September 16.—Hugh gave me a specimen of an obstinate fit this morning. He can be excessively obstinate. He was playing with some marbles, when I called him to his lessons. This put him out, and when he dropped one and I told him to pick it up, he crawled about on the floor, pretending he could not see it; and when I actually pointed it out, he still would not pick it up. I cut the matter very short by lifting him up on a stool, and telling him that, as he could not find the marble, of course he could not play with it, and therefore I should take possession of it.

‘But I will do it, mamma. I see it now. I will pick it up.’

‘No,’ I said. ‘You would not do it when I wished you to do it, and now I won’t allow you to do it. You will sit there for ten minutes, and then come to your lessons.’

The poor little man’s spirit was quite broken, and he began to cry bitterly, and in the midst of his rather noisy grief, Captain Shaw was announced.

I felt quite cross at his coming so early, and then scolded myself for impatience; and was thoroughly penitent when I found that the object of the visit was to bring some grapes for Cecil, and to enquire after her.

‘A very charming little girl! my dear madam. I should like to offer her something worthy of herself,’ was the old man’s courteous way of introducing his present. ‘But I see a sad sight!’ and he looked at Hugh with

such a doleful expression, that I could scarcely keep my countenance; and then, turning away, pretended to cover his face with his hands, whilst Hugh left off crying, and stared at him with his great round eyes, forgetting his shame in his astonishment. 'A sad sight! a young delinquent! And yet, madam, a cheering sight. "Spare the rod, and spoil the child." Though, in this case, it is not a rod, but rather a stool of repentance.'

'You may get down and run round the garden, now, Hugh,' I said; 'and presently you shall come back and finish your lessons.'

'I am interrupting the studies. But I will not detain you, except to ask for the young lady—Miss——'

'Cecil,' I said.

'Cecil! It is a curious name. Young gentleman—' and the captain caught hold of Hugh as he was making his way past him, and held him fast between his knees—'you will one day thank your mother for this discipline.'

Hugh struggled to get away.

'Stand still, my dear!' I said, very decidedly, for I was afraid of a scene; and Hugh, who quite understood my tone, was quiet directly.

'Oh, madam!' continued the old captain, when, at length, he released the child, 'would that all were like him! But the present age——'

I am afraid I interrupted him rather brusquely, for I really had no time to spare for the sins of the age.

'The present age is a very provoking one, Captain Shaw,' I said; 'but I am not sure that it is worse than any other. You know we are told in the Bible not to enquire "why the former days were better than these," and I often think what wonderful wisdom there is in the warning. One must do the best one can with the world as it is.'

'Very true. my dear madam, perfectly true. And

yet I confess I desire greatly to hear, "Sir," and, "Ma'am," as I was accustomed to hear it in my childhood. I was brought up strictly, madam—respectfully. I was taught to honour my father and mother.'

'Educated, in fact, upon the catechism,' I said. 'So was I.'

'And you reverence it, madam? You teach it to your children? you implant its precepts early? Ah! then, indeed, we are friends.'

And the old man grasped my hand so heartily, that, with the pain of having one of my rings pressed in, I could scarcely help crying out. He must have thought the distressed expression of my face caused by some deep emotion, for he went on, with a half apology, half eulogy, which made me feel quite ashamed, whilst I recalled the neglects and mistakes of which I had been guilty in the task of education. He ended with saying—

'And, madam, since you so thoroughly understand the theory of education, no doubt it is your delight?'

I really could not help laughing, though he was so intensely serious. As for explaining to him that I had no theory of education, that I looked upon it as a heavy responsibility for which I was grievously unfit, and that I undertook it only because God had appointed it to me—where would have been the use? No one understands humility speeches; so I avoided a direct answer, and merely said that it was pleasant to educate one's own children.

'But all these young people are not——' he stopped—began again—hesitated—and then coloured, like a young girl.

'All these young people are not my own children?' I said.

'Ah, my dear madam!—yes. I did not know—I was afraid—you must forgive my seeming impertinence, but

I learnt yesterday, for the first time, that the young ladies' mother——'

'Was a Miss Penryhn,' I said.

'And, I believe, one of the Penryhns of Arling?'

'Yes; she died when Cecil was six months old.'

'The Penryhns of Arling!' he repeated again, slowly.

'Do you know anything of them?' I asked.

'Ah! my dear madam, long ago—twenty, thirty, nearly forty years—I was living in the same parish. Poor Harry Penrhyn! He must have been the uncle of these sweet young girls.'

'He is in Australia now,' I said.

'Yes, I knew it; but I have never liked to ask questions about him. Mrs. Randolph naturally feels it a painful subject.'

'I don't understand,' I said. 'Mrs. Randolph is not related to the Penryhns.'

'Not related; but, of course, you are aware that there was a most intimate association; that, indeed, there might have been a connection between the two families?'

'No, indeed, Captain Shaw, I know nothing. Mrs. Randolph is a complete stranger to me. I have never been told—and I should be so very glad,—I do beg you——' I was growing so eager that I was obliged to check myself, and I ended with, 'I shall be much obliged if you will tell me what you refer to.'

Then came a whole family history—a history which occupied my thoughts, so that poor little Hugh and his lessons were forgotten. Mrs. Randolph, it seems, was, as she said herself, Katharine Penryhn's dearest friend. They were almost brought up together. Mrs. Randolph had a younger sister, with whom Henry Penryhn fell desperately in love. Both families liked the idea of the marriage, and everything was going on well, when the poor girl was thrown from her horse, as she was out

riding, and killed on the spot. Henry Penryhn had been weak in principle before, and now he plunged into dissipation—gambled, and at last drank. It must have been at that time that my husband formed so very bad an opinion of him; for the marriage of Cecilia Penrhyn (the children's mother) was delayed for some time, owing to pecuniary difficulties caused by Henry Penryhn's extravagance. His friends, hoping that a thorough change of scene and occupation might do something for him, sent him to Australia. That is where I could take up his history, and add a few facts which Captain Shaw did not know before, and especially that of his having a sensible wife.

'Ah! the blessing of a good wife!' exclaimed the captain, when I mentioned this. 'I have never had the felicity of experiencing it. I am cautious, unwisely so, perhaps; but the risk is great. Yet, a good wife!—surely, as it is said in Holy Writ, "her price is above rubies."'

'And in Henry Penrhyn's case,' I said, 'it is the more astonishing that he should have a good wife, because he is so undeserving of it.'

'Pardon me, dear madam! I knew Henry Penryhn well. He was undeserving, no man more so, in the eyes of his fellow-creatures. But he had a charm! ah! he had a charm!'

The old man's voice trembled.

'Was he clever?' I asked.

'Brilliant: the best talker, the most elegant scholar, the most agreeable companion; so warm-hearted, so generous, and handsome! Ah! madam, he was an Adonis.'

'But he drank,' I said, rather bitterly.

'Yes, he drank. Madam, that is a temptation you cannot understand.'

'No,' I said—and I could not help smiling—'I am thankful to say I cannot. But it is the one sin which I dread almost above all others, for my boys; and I should

be miserable if I thought they inherited the tendency. It is, you know, at times inherited.'

'Yes, at times. Have you ever heard that it is so in the case of poor Harry Penryhn's family?'

'I have not heard anything. I know nothing about him or them!' I exclaimed, rather eagerly.

'Mrs. Randolph is, I believe, still kept thoroughly cognisant of the affairs of the Penryhn family,' continued Captain Shaw, 'but she is reticent.'

'Is she?' I spoke doubtfully.

'Yes, reticent upon some subjects. I need not say to you, madam, that Mrs. Randolph is an unhappy woman.'

That was too large a topic to enter upon, and I made no reply.

'I would crave your sympathy for her,' continued the old man.

'Certainly, yes. But, indeed, Captain Shaw, I must be careful, for the sake of my girls; and Mrs. Randolph is——' I did not know what else to say, so I ended with 'eccentric.'

'You are right, dear madam; I forgot. Yes, you are quite right. Strict propriety, the observances of society, must be attended to. I honour you for reminding me. When I spoke I forgot that you were not alone. Madam, your children will repay and bless you. I have interrupted the lessons too long, and I wish you good morning.'

Poor little Hugh! he came off but badly with his lessons after this conversation. I do not know when I have been more troubled. In my search for a retired home, to have stumbled upon a person so intimately associated with the Penryhns, in the form of my next-door neighbour, and that neighbour Mrs. Randolph, is unquestionably trying. If she were only a few degrees worse than she is, I might cut her; but as things are, I can see that Mrs.

Bradshaw hopes that in some way I shall be of use to her. And to complete my annoyance, a note from Marietta to Ina was sent in this afternoon, whilst we were reading history, begging for the loan of Tennyson's Poems, and ending with, 'Will it not be too happy to read them and talk of them together?' I can say nothing against lending the book; if it were Byron, I might object; but the two girls will work themselves up into a fit of romance over 'Mariana and the Moated Grange,' and then there will be still more sympathy and excitement; and Ina's thoughts and interests, which are already hovering around Marietta and Woodleigh, will be fixed there. Were Marietta alone, it might be less objectionable, but with Mr. Randolph in the background!—And then, as yet, I know so little of Ina. Alas! for girls' friendships! How I have dreaded them!

September 15.—Actually a note from Mrs. Penryhn to Ina, forwarded through Mrs. Randolph! Marietta brought it in this afternoon, and lingered, evidently with delight, talking over the poems. I could not, before her, ask what the note contained. Ina gave it to Cecil, who carried it away as she was going out of the room. These are the things which make me feel that I am not the children's true mother, and that there is another influence competing with mine. It seemed to me an actual rudeness when Ina handed the note to Cecil as a matter of course; and yet I had no positive right to complain, and I am sure Cecil had not the least idea of being wanting in respect, and indeed took the note away because she thought it awkward to read it before Marietta. Cecil has much more tact than Ina, simply, I think, because she is more unselfish, and therefore has a quicker perception of what others feel and think.

But I heard the contents of the note soon enough—too soon for my own peace of mind. Mrs. Penryhn is

rejoiced to hear that the cherished friend of her much-lamented daughter Katharine, is living so near to her sweet grandchildren, and trusts that Ina and Cecil will see a great deal of her. She will be able to tell them many interesting facts respecting their dear mother's early days. It really is too bad of Mrs. Penryhn; I am utterly ignored. There is no reference to my wishes; not the slightest suggestion that my approbation of the intimacy is a matter of moment. And she must know what Mrs. Randolph is. It seems as if it must have been done purposely to annoy me. It is impossible that Mrs. Penryhn can really wish these children to be intimate with a person like Mrs. Randolph. If she does she is more foolish than I gave her credit for being. Even in a worldly sense, everything depends upon the society into which young people are first thrown. Let them be mixed up with a fast set, or be allowed to do imprudent or doubtful things, and there is a slur cast upon them, the effects of which they will probably feel through life. From what Mrs. Bradshaw said to me, I suspect that if I were once to allow Ina and Cecil to be very intimate at Woodleigh, I should find the doors of all the really good houses quickly closed against me. This seems a worldly consideration, and yet it is not so. It is a grievous thing for girls when quiet sober-minded people look suspiciously at them; and, taking society as it is, the only safeguard for young people is the observance of those formal laws of propriety which have been established because they have been found to be necessary.

When we are angels we shall, no doubt, live as angels do, but till then I am sure we must be content to bear with the restrictions which belong to our condition as frail mortals. A woman who does not care what the world says of her, may, in herself, be as innocent of evil as a child a day old, but she is setting an example which may

lead others to destruction; and that can never be innocent. I write this really to satisfy myself. I feel as if I was such a coward about Mrs. Randolph, and uncharitable too; yet I am sure I do not want to be so, and I can quite appreciate and understand Mrs. Bradshaw's intimacy; but then she has no young people about her.

It was when Marietta was gone that Ina brought me her grandmamma's note, triumphantly.

'Dear mamma, just see! Grandmamma knows Mrs. Randolph very well indeed, and she hopes we shall see a great deal of her. Isn't it nice? I showed the note to Marietta when we went upstairs, and she is so pleased; for she hopes now that you will let us go in to see her sometimes.'

'We will talk about it, my dear,' I said; and Ina turned away, and went upstairs, proud, and, I am sure, chilled.

I could almost have cried with vexation. Cecil lingered by me.

'Mamma, we won't ask to go, if you don't wish it.'

'I will think about it, dear child. I am not very fond of your having extremely intimate friends; and though your grandmamma knows Mrs. Randolph well, I do not.'

'But it is not Mrs. Randolph that we care for,' said Cecil; 'it is Marietta. Oh, mamma! you can't think how nice she is!'

'I dare say she is very nice,' I said; 'but, Cecil, when you and Ina receive notes from anyone, will you remember that it is right to show them to me before anyone else sees them?'

Cecil blushed. 'Yes, we forgot; we were all talking together, and Marietta was saying that Mrs. Randolph had been telling her about Arling; and then Ina gave her the note, I am sure, without thinking. But I am so sorry, dear mamma! and Ina will be sorry too.'

'It does not signify now, love, only for the time to

come. And, of course, you like to hear of anyone who has been at Arling?’

‘Yes, and anyone who knew about ——’

Cecil paused.

‘About your own mother, my darling?’

‘I can’t help wishing to hear about her,’ said Cecil, in a low voice.

‘It would be very wrong and unnatural if you did not wish it,’ I said. ‘And you know, Cecil, I want to hear about her too, because I am educating you for her; and when I have to give you up to her, I should like you to be all that she would have wished you to be.’

‘Are you really educating us for her?’ asked Cecil. The idea seemed to strike her as something new, and a singular look of thoughtfulness came over her face, as she added, ‘but I should like you to educate us for yourself too.’

I think my kiss must sufficiently have answered that wish, and Cecil ran off to a game of play with Agnes; and soon after they both came to me, eager to go with nurse and the little ones down to the beach, and take Rover with them: but Ina shut herself up in her room all the afternoon, and my heart has been very heavy.

CHAPTER XII.

September 17.—Ina is very strange. I can't at all make her out. The cloud has passed away almost entirely; the only trace left of it seems to be a fancy for sitting up in her own room, instead of joining the others. This throws Cecil and Agnes more together, for which I am not at all sorry. Mrs. Randolph will, I am afraid, think me rude; but I have not been near her since we met on the shore. Independent of inclination, I have really not had time. Marietta, however, came in this morning with a note from Mrs. Randolph, asking if her niece might be allowed to go with my children to bathe. Marietta, she said, had not been accustomed to bathe, and she did not like her to go alone, and there was no one to send with her. Marietta, I am sure, did not know what the note contained. She stood by me, as I was reading it, her little head erect, and, with an air of proud humility, refused to sit down, because she was intruding upon me. When I said, 'It is unfortunate, Marietta, that you came so late, for Ina and Cecil are already gone to bathe,' her eyes flashed, and, unable to retain her excited feeling, she exclaimed, 'Then she has asked! I did not think she would do it. I knew you would not wish it. It was unkind, unfair! I prefer not to bathe.'

'But why, my dear? Are you afraid?'

'Afraid! Signora? I do not know fear. It is my aunt's will.'

'And that is a reason you should obey, is it not?' I asked.

She looked at me with a curious searching glance, and answered coldly, 'I can obey some people.'

'But you are under your aunt's care, and therefore you are bound to obey her,' I said; 'and no doubt she is anxious for your health.'

'She thinks she is,' was Marietta's answer. 'I would do what she wishes, if it would do her good; but it will do no good.'

'I don't understand,' I said. This question of bathing concerns you, Marietta, not your aunt.'

'Ah! yes, it concerns me; so she says: but, Signora, I pray you to say that it cannot be. I desire not in the least to do it.'

'Because you think you would be in the way?' I continued; though I felt that my question sounded like an encouragement of the plan which in my heart I disliked.

'I desire to go by myself. I told my aunt it was so. She did wrong to write. I love Ina, but I am ready to say good-bye to her;' and, to my extreme surprise, Marietta burst into a flood of passionate Italian tears; such tears as we self-restrained English have no idea of.

It was impossible to be cold then. I entreated to be told what was the matter; and in a sudden, just as the sun breaks through a cloud, the mist of tears passed away from Marietta's eyes, and their sad depth of expression was changed into an actually radiant joy, as she flung her arms round me and exclaimed, 'Do you love me? can you love me? you, so good! Ah! I am at heart very sorrowful!' and again her face was as mournful as the moment before it had been glad.

It may have been very unwise,—certainly it was contrary to all my resolutions,—but I made Marietta sit down by me, and I held her hand in mine, and smoothed her glossy hair, coaxing her to tell me all that was in her

mind; and at length drew from her the confession of her troubles.

With her quick instinct, she had seen that I was afraid of her being Ina's companion. She was proud, and had tried to draw back; but Ina exercised a kind of fascination over her, and thus she had been carried on almost without meaning it.

'And, Signora,' she said, 'things are sad at Woodleigh. My poor aunt has dark hours: then I think of Ina, and I am happy; and then I think of you, and I say I will not go, I am not needed; but I do go, and I come back happy, because I have a friend. And there is poetry, and much talking that I like. Oh! so different from Woodleigh! The clever people there, they make me oftentimes shudder. And my poor aunt, oh! my poor aunt!'

'Do you mean that she is unhappy?' I asked.

'Ah! yes; sometimes it is terrible. She will do wild things some day; and my uncle looks to me.'

'Does Mr. Randolph then wish you to stay here?' I said, anxious to have some light thrown upon this poor lonely child's history.

'Yes, at present. I was left to him when my father died in Italy; it was two years ago. He and my father were brothers, and I am very fond of him; and it makes me so very, very sad to see that he is miserable; so I wanted to stay always with him. But he does not live a life so that he can have me. He is by himself in London, and he sends me down here with my aunt, and thinks I can do good with her. But no one can, Signora, no one can; at least, when it is the dark hour with her. And what is to become of us?'

'Is Mrs. Randolph unkind to you, then,' I said, 'when these dark hours, as you call them, come upon her?'

'Not worse to me than she is to everyone. Her maid' can do most with her; but we none of us know

what will bring it on; only we displease her about some little matter, and then she is very angry, and says most terrible things; and very often she is hysterical, and then she takes laudanum, and is quiet; but she cries so bitterly afterwards, and is so sad, so hopeless! That is what we call the dark hour. She says it is because of my uncle that she is wretched, and that he does not love her. But he does, or he did once; only, you see, it has always been her temper that has come between them; and she will never obey anyone, and he says he will be obeyed. And it is, oh! so very, very sad! Perhaps—I don't want to think my uncle stern, he means entirely to do right, and he must judge best; but, I think, sometimes, he might do more with my aunt, if he would not command so much.'

A most sad revelation this was, worse even than Mrs. Bradshaw had led me to expect: the result, I imagine, of an utterly undisciplined mind, disappointed in its affection. But it is a cruel thing to lay such a burden upon a young girl. Marietta has evidently a stronger mind than the generality of persons at her age, but she cannot be fit to cope with a woman like Mrs. Randolph; and who knows what the end may be? It looks like selfishness on Mr. Randolph's part; that kind of stern selfishness which takes the form of principle, and is, therefore, utterly deceptive. But a more definite anxiety offered itself before Marietta left me. It seems there is a Lady Chase, a most unsatisfactory person, so far as I can gather from Marietta, who has lately exercised an immense influence over Mrs. Randolph. She is Mr. Randolph's detestation, and he vows that he will have nothing to do with his wife till this friendship is given up. Then comes in the false feeling of romantic affection, and Mrs. Randolph refuses; and Lady Chase, it seems, is to be asked to Woodleigh to stay. Poor Marietta says that if she should be, it will drive her uncle frantic. The poor child

evidently does not know exactly why Lady Chase is considered so objectionable, except that she interferes between husband and wife; but it is evident to me, from little things which came out, that she is a very bad style of person. Her chief fault, in Marietta's eyes, is that she makes use of Mrs. Randolph and spends her money. I asked Marietta what was done with Victor in the midst of all these disturbances.

'Oh! that is the worst of all,' was her answer. 'He has his will, and he does not learn except when I teach him; and then he is so rude, and he will not attend, and I give it up.'

I asked why his father did not interfere, and take the boy to be with him.

The only reply was, 'My uncle does not lead the kind of life that he can have a child with him. He has no settled home.'

'But, surely he may send him to school!' I exclaimed.

'He is thinking of it now; but there are difficulties about it. My uncle chooses one school, and my aunt objects, or rather Lady Chase objects, and there is a great deal of writing and talking and delay; but he must go soon, or he will be——'

'Ruined,' I said. 'Dear child, all this is very grievous, and I fear I cannot help you in it. There is no help but in God.'

'So Mr. L'Estrange says. I cannot tell him all as I can you, but he knows a little; and he tells me he is sorry, and will pray God to help me; and God has helped me, because He has sent me you, and Ina.'

Those were her parting words, as she gave me another Italian embrace, and ran away, having made the engagement to come the day after to-morrow and bathe with the two girls.

And now what is to be done? What is the use of reso-

lutions, if, at the very first moment, they are to be thus broken down? And yet am I bound, for the sake of my children, to stop this friendship entirely? Can I stop it? What would be the effect upon Ina? Would it not create an ill-feeling on Mrs. Randolph's part, and might it not through her reach Mrs. Penryhn's ears, and so increase the prejudice against me, and do me mischief with the children? And then as regards Marietta, can I entirely cast the poor child off, standing alone as she does, and with such heavy responsibilities upon her? On the other hand, let this intimacy continue, and I lay myself open to all the disagreeables which may arise from being mixed up with Mrs. Randolph's affairs, and I shall have great difficulty in keeping myself and the children out of the society which, from all accounts, is so undesirable. My only hope is, that I may be able to manage as Mrs. Bradshaw does—to take a distinct line of my own, and go so far and no farther. It sounds presumptuous. We have no control over circumstances; and though people, I know, think me a model of prudence and propriety, I am really led away by feeling very much oftener than it is wise to be. If the intimacy should do harm to the girls, I shall never forgive myself. But I must say my prayers and go to bed, for my mind grows weary with thought, and I am miserably tired. Oh, the longing one has for the advice which used to be always at hand!

September 18.—Prayer was my only rest last night, and I should have been very weary without it; for I lay awake for hours, thinking over all the *pros* and *cons* of the question, and trying to find out where the right lay. I felt I should be helped at last, but the time seemed very long, as I listened to the clock at the Manor stables striking the quarters of the hours; and there was a feeling of intense awfulness in the deep night stillness, with only the rush of the waves to break it—that unceasing rush

which makes one think of the 'ever never, never, for ever' of eternity. In the night one sees so clearly what the importance of all these questions left to one's decision really is—how in each there is a choice which must, more or less, influence everlasting destinies. In the daytime the near objects blind one. I tried, at last, to put away the reasoning upon results, and to take the case simply as it stands at present. The intimacy may be good, it may be bad, in its effects; I cannot decide. There are things to be said for and against it, though I think the *against* preponderates.

But, as the matter stands now, I must consider that I have no reason to suppose Marietta an unfit companion for Ina; quite the reverse. She strikes me as singularly truthful and high-minded; and her sense and knowledge of the world are far beyond her years, for she is only just eighteen. Taking her by herself, I certainly should, so far as I can at present see, be inclined to further the friendship. Then with regard to Mrs. Randolph. She is received into society. Mrs. Bradshaw vouches for there being nothing amiss, beyond temper and imprudence; and Mrs. Penryhn (though I do not value her opinion) has taken upon herself to introduce her to Ina; and thus not only sanctions the acquaintance, but also, in a manner, forces it upon me. Lastly, Marietta's confidence has been given me without my seeking, and I cannot help seeing that I may be a great help and comfort to her. I note all these things now as a support to myself in my own eyes, in case—as I do not hide from myself may probably happen—I should hereafter have reason to regret the conclusion at which I have arrived. The first requisite for peace of mind is a quiet conscience—one which is not raking among the ashes of the past, and striving to collect from among them the scattered motives and purposes which are needed for self-justification.

External circumstances, I believe, point out that, at least for the present, the friendship between the two girls must be allowed to go on. But as I have considerable misgivings about it, I intend to take it into my own hands, and make myself a party to it. So long as I throw myself into it, I shall, I hope, be able to check, and watch, and keep it within safe limits. I will not cultivate Mrs. Randolph's acquaintance. She already has friends in Mrs. Bradshaw and Mr. L'Estrange. If they cannot help her, I am sure I cannot. I intend, therefore, to say plainly to Marietta that I shall be glad to see her if she likes to come to the cottage, but that I cannot allow Ina to go to Woodleigh. I suspect Marietta will quite understand, and think me perfectly right. If Mrs. Randolph should press the matter, I shall say that Ina never goes anywhere without me, and I can then take her to call there formally, so as to satisfy her grandmother.

I am so much happier now that I seem to see my way clearly. I may be mistaken, but I prayed very earnestly that I might not be; and I do not feel that I have any double motive. External Providential circumstances, rather than results, are, I think, intended to be one's guide, when there is no self-evident right or wrong in a matter.

Yet I foresee many annoyances, caused mainly by the fact, that I do not, as yet, thoroughly understand Ina's character. There is just something in it which gives me the idea of insincerity; but I am not a believer in insincerity as a motive, and I suspect that what appears to be so is rather a very determined self-will, which must carry its point, and when direct means fail, will choose those which are indirect. I had a specimen of this to-day, accidentally. The letters to be sent to the post are generally laid on a slab, in the entrance hall, near the

drawing-room door. I had written mine, and left them on the slab, and had gone out into the garden, when, as I was passing the study window, I heard Cecil say to Ina—

‘Are not you going to tell mamma that you are writing to grandmamma? She may have something to put into the letter.’

Ina’s reply was inaudible, but the tone was cross. I went into the hall, and Ina came out of the study with a letter in her hand. When she saw me, instead of putting it on the slab, as I felt sure she intended to do, she ran upstairs. It was just post time; Stephen came for the letters almost immediately, and I supposed Ina intended to keep the letter until to-morrow, in order to show it to me. I went back to the garden, and turned into the side-walk; but happening to hear the gate into the lane swing to rather violently, I looked round and saw Ina, without her hat, rushing after some one. She went down the lane a few steps, overtook Stephen, gave him something, and came back again. And just then I met her.

She looked startled, but said, directly—

‘Oh, mamma! I hope you don’t mind? I only wanted to overtake Stephen, to give him a letter for grandmamma.’

‘But why not have it ready before, my dear?’ I said. ‘You know I always beg of you to be in time with your letters, and I don’t like the running out into the lane in that fashion.’

‘Oh yes, I know; and I am so sorry. But I wished it to go to-day.’

‘Was it the letter you had in your hand when you passed me in the hall?’

‘Yes; but then——’

‘ Well, dear, why did you not put it on the slab? was there anything to add to it?’

‘ No, mamma; but I thought—I did not wish to leave it there.’

‘ And why not?’

Ina hesitated.

I said, half smiling, ‘ Because you were a little afraid that mamma would stop it, and ask to hear what had been said in it.’

‘ I really—but, mamma, there was nothing in it that you might not have seen.’

‘ I am quite sure there was not, dear; and you know, as a general rule, I never wish to interfere, in the least, with your correspondence with your grandmamma. Only, in this case, I think I should have liked to know what you had said about Mrs. Randolph and Marietta.’

‘ I said very little; nothing that you could have objected to, mamma.’

‘ Then, dear child, there could be no reason why I should not know it.’

‘ I can tell you now. I can remember nearly every word,’ said Ina. ‘ I told her that we had not seen much of Mrs. Randolph, but that her niece, Marietta, came in very often, and that we liked her extremely, and I thought we should be great friends.’

‘ There is no harm in that, certainly,’ I said. ‘ The only thing I should have suggested, would have been that it was rather soon to say anything about being great friends.’

‘ But I do like Marietta extremely, and I do think we shall be great friends,’ persisted Ina.

‘ Possibly,’ I replied; ‘ but still I should have preferred your not saying anything about it, because it may lead your grandmamma to expect what I may think it better should not be.’

Ina's face clouded.

'There is no harm done, my love,' I said. 'These few words of yours will, probably, neither make nor mar the matter. All I want you to feel is, that knowing—as I think you did, or, at least, suspecting—that what you said might be of consequence, it would have been better to have given me the opportunity of offering an opinion.'

'Only,' said Ina, 'I was quite sure that you would not disapprove; I had said so little.'

'Yet—tell me if I do you injustice—it seems as if you carried the letter upstairs in order that I might not stop it.'

'Yes, I was afraid. Mamma, you think I wished to deceive you, and I did not.'

'No,' I replied, 'you did not wish to deceive me, Ina; but you were quite resolved to have your own way, and to send the letter as it stood.'

Ina was silent for a few seconds; then she said, 'Mamma, I do want to have Marietta for my friend.'

'Quite natural, my love; I could almost say, quite right; for Marietta strikes me as being, so far as I can judge, a very charming girl. But now, Ina, you have been quite open with me, and I shall be quite open with you. I like what I have seen of Marietta; but I do not like Mrs. Randolph. For that reason I cannot at all say as yet how far it may or may not be desirable to encourage an intimacy with Marietta. I ask you to trust to me. If I see that it is good for you, I will invite Marietta here; but I can never allow you to go to Woodleigh alone.'

'But grandmamma likes Mrs. Randolph, and wishes me very much to know her!' exclaimed Ina.

'Your grandmamma, I imagine, knew Mrs. Randolph some years ago; she may have altered since then. At any rate, as I am the person responsible for you now, I

am obliged to act according to my own judgment and conscience. 'I ask you again to trust me.'

'I know you mean to be very kind,' said Ina, somewhat mollified.

'Yes, I do mean it,' I said, earnestly. 'If you knew me well, Ina, you would see that there is no personal sacrifice which you could ask that I would refuse; but I cannot give up principle. I promise you, though, that I will not interfere in any hidden way to prevent your seeing Marietta. Whatever I do you shall know, and I will tell you my reasons so far as I possibly can. And if I treat you thus fairly, then I must ask you to deal in the same manner with me. Tell me what your wish is, and believe that I will help you to obtain it, if it is justifiable; but do not try to compass your object by little indirect means, which look very like—what shall I say? Not, perhaps, deceit, but that which very nearly approaches it—shuffling.'

'I never thought of that sort of thing being shuffling,' said Ina; 'we all did it at school. When we wanted to have our own way we managed to get it, that was all.'

'Precisely; that was all. Ina, dear, I want you to see how much there is contained in that expression "that was all." It means, to accustom ourselves to a low moral standard—to suppose that everything which is not absolutely wrong, is right.'

'And is it not?' inquired Ina, eagerly.

'Not according to my ideas,' I said, 'and not according to those of an infinitely better and wiser person. I must give you for a motto a very favourite sentence of mine, which I gathered from Archbishop Leighton, and which has stood me in good stead all my life—"He that will always do all he lawfully may, shall often do something that lawfully he may not."'

'I see,' was Ina's reply. 'Mamma, I was wrong; but it was not deceit.'

‘Not, perhaps, strictly speaking; but it was wilfulness. And if we once indulge wilfulness, it may lead to deceit. So you will guard against it, and pray against it, I know.’

Ina whispered as she kissed me, ‘Mamma, I should have been so much better if I had lived with you all my life.’

Perhaps—I have a kind of glimmering hope it may be so—Ina’s standard of goodness is really being raised.

CHAPTER XIII.

September 29. — Mr. L'Estrange wants help in the Sunday-school. He called to-day to talk to me about it. I don't see how I am to give it, for really my own children are my first care. And yet I have a strong feeling as to the importance of keeping up an interest in the parish and the schools, both for one's own sake, and that of the children. I dread being self-engrossed, even though the self may include all the home residents, children and servants. Mr. L'Estrange insists upon afternoon school. I object to it. I don't like making the Sunday such a day of mental work, and I think the morning quite enough, except, perhaps, for those who have no other opportunity of learning anything. Still, as it is Mr. L'Estrange's parish and not mine, I must be content to follow his lead; and as the time in the afternoon happens to suit me, I promised him I would think about it.

In his cold stiff way he was very civil, and greatly obliged. 'It was difficult,' he said, 'to get help. There were differences which kept people apart, unfortunately.'

I regretted, of course, and wondered, of course, and hoped that he would proceed to tell me what the differences were, and so give me the opportunity of learning a little more of the politics of the parish. But—most cautious of men!—he withdrew into his shell as soon as he saw that I was in the least inclined to draw him out, and all I could get from him was the sapient remark, that there was no parish without differences. We talked a little of the poor. There, again, he is peculiar. I hap-

pened to say that I should like to know the names of any poor or sick persons, to whom I might occasionally send soup, or any little delicacy we might happen to have; and he instantly read me a homily upon the demoralising effect of weak benevolence. He wishes, he says, to make his people self-supporting and independent. Very admirable! And I agreed so heartily that I certainly softened him, for he ventured out again a little and said, that circumstances had taught him that it was desirable to keep the superintendence of the parish charities in his own hands. Also very excellent. But what has that to do with my giving away a little soup, or a piece of pudding? I went back again to the school. 'At what time did it open?' 'At two precisely. The afternoon service was at three.' Poor little children! I thought, and poor tired teachers! Very little time there will be for dinner and rest between the morning and afternoon duties.

'Then the school really lasts only half an hour?' I said.

'Exactly that time,' was the reply. 'The teachers are expected to be in their places punctually at two. It is very important. There is no example like that of punctuality; in fact, nothing can be done without it.' And the good man looked so sternly at me, that I felt just as I used to do when my governess gave me an extra lesson to learn for being late at breakfast. I did not tell him that unpunctuality had been one of my besetting faults from childhood, and that, with all my efforts, I had never quite overcome it: it would have sent him out of the house at once. So I made many humble promises, and asked a few more questions as to the ages of the children, and what they had been accustomed to learn; and then he actually relaxed into a gracious smile, shook hands cordially, and was, I am sure, going to say something quite civil and pleasant, when in walked Mrs. Bradshaw, and in an instant his collar seemed to stiffen, and his back to

straighten, and he was again solemn and cold; yet with an alarmed expression in his face, which quite accounted for the haste with which he hurried away.

Mrs. Bradshaw and I laughed as soon as the door was closed; it was impossible to help it.

'It is as I said!' she exclaimed; 'he lives in deadly terror of me. I wish I did not enjoy it as I do; it makes me behave so naughtily.'

'And he is so worthy,' I said.

'Yes, stuffed with worthiness so full that he can't even bend his back. Don't you remember (I take it for granted our reminiscences are the same), when we were children, how we used to perform the operation of un-branning our dolls, in order to give them joints? It is a thousand pities that we can't treat our excellent rector's mind in the same way. But what has he been here for?'

'To ask me to take a class in the Sunday-school.'

'Oh! he has come to that, has he? It really is delightful. So he is discomfited: but he won't own it.'

'I don't understand: what do you mean?'

'Oh, nothing particular; a long story and a tedious one. School feuds are the most tiresome of all feuds.'

'And the most inveterate,' I said.

'Well, yes, perhaps so. The fact is, everyone who has half a grain of principle thinks he or she is called upon to educate others, simply to make up for the deficiencies in the education of self. We are all bent upon education in this village, because, you see, we really are, upon the whole, a very respectable set of people.'

'But it is the rector's special business,' I said.

'My dear, say that to Lady Anson, and she will never speak to you again. The rector's business! Who built the schools, and endowed them? Who gives the children their brown hats and blue ribbons? Who pays for the

school feast? And who offers a prize for the best needle-work? Why, the school has been Lady Anson's hobby—more than her hobby; it has been the one thing she has lived for, for years.'

'And the one thing which the rector has lived for too,' I said.

'Yes, but not here; we have not had the experience of two kings of Brentford,—or, what is worse, a king and a queen,—till within the last year and a quarter.'

'And the queen does not like her new position, I suppose?'

'How should she? How should anyone? And after all, it was a very pleasant easy-going time when we had everything our own way. Old Mrs. Dawes, the school-mistress, priding herself upon good knitting and good samplers, and utterly ignoring the acquaintance of preterite tenses and adjective pronouns; and Lady Anson giving a prize to the child who could repeat the "little busy bee" without a fault: and Sir John thinking that his one duty to the school was to give roast beef and plum pudding to the children on New Year's Day. There were no inspectors then, no certificated mistresses, no capitation grants. Those might have been the dark ages, but they tired one's eyes much less than the light ones.'

'But surely,' I said, 'this state of things cannot have continued up to the last twelvemonth?'

'Oh no; I have been speaking of days beyond the memory of man. Latterly we have thought it necessary to advance with the age, or at least, we were told that we ought to do so; and in the innocence of our hearts, we believed what was said, and one fine morning we made a start.'

'In what direction—a government inspector?'

'Pity forbid! Good Mrs. Dawes would have expired on the spot at the sight of him. No; we eschewed a govern-

ment inspector. Lady Anson thought he would ask her to conjugate an auxiliary verb, and I was afraid he would put me through the dates of the English kings; and as we were the chief managers of affairs, we declined having anything to do with him. But what we did take to was a diocesan inspector, a sober-minded, steady-going churchman; not one of the new lights, but, as we supposed, holding the catechism in reverent admiration, and being content if the children could say their "Duty to their neighbour" fluently, and more than content if they could go through the "Desire" without a mistake. Up to that point we thought we were quite safe; so we sent to request a visit from the diocesan inspector, and very humbly we suggested that if he would give us some idea beforehand as to the subjects which he should think it necessary to examine us in, we should be greatly indebted. We had a most courteous answer—very pleased, very willing, &c., &c.; and we were to have a list of subjects in a few days.'

'Well!'

'The list came: reading, spelling, arithmetic, Bible history—all very simple—and ending with the first six of the Thirty-nine Articles.'

'You are joking,' I said.

'Joking? no, indeed! I wish it had been joking. It was the most serious earnest I ever had in my life. You see the diocesan inspector had been advancing with the age too. He travelled on the theological road, as the government did on the secular, and this was the result. Now Lady Anson has sense enough to admit an idea, but not enough to get rid of one; and so, being possessed by the prospect of diocesan inspection, she was determined to carry it through: and as no one ever took any part in the school teaching except myself, she entirely depended upon me for seeing that the inspector's requisitions were com-

plied with. It was no use to protest, we should have parted deadly enemies; and as to making her perceive any difficulty in the Thirty-nine Articles, she saw it no more than a scientific friend of mine did in another case, when, being asked some question about the mystery of the principle of life, he answered quickly, "Life, life! we all know what life is: oxygen is life."

'And the children learnt the six Articles then?' I said.

'To be sure they did. "Very grand words," as Mrs. Dawes, in her most respectful and reverential tone, observed to me; but she hoped the gentleman would not question the children, for she certainly had never been able herself to see why the books of Scripture should be called *conical*; meaning, you will understand, *canonical*. Seizing upon this hint, I bethought me it would be well to examine them myself. I took to reading, got up some one—I forget whom—on the Articles, wrote abridgments and explanations in words of one syllable for baby comprehension; and at length, feeling myself fully armed, seated myself on a high stool at the top of the school, gathered the children round me, and began.'

'Let me be the school,' I said, 'and give me the benefit of the explanation; for the Thirty-nine Articles were not part of my religious education, and the words of one syllable will be a great help.'

'Ah! you may well laugh at me, but it was no laughing matter then. In the midst of my work,—the children going through the lesson by rote in first-rate style (for Mrs. Dawes would have made them repeat "Paradise Lost" perfectly if it had been set before her as a duty), in marched a party of visitors—people who had walked over from Westford—spies, rather personal enemies, given to quizzing advanced education under any form. Before I was in the least aware of their presence, or could stop the lesson, they were behind me and listening; and I!—My dear, I

had commenced my questionings and expoundings, and was floundering in the most frightful way, forgetting all I had intended to say, making some most unfortunate and inappropriate illustration—I forget exactly what, only I know it sounded by no means reverent—and the children were staring at me, and wondering whether I had gone out of my mind, when I heard a low satirical voice close at my ear,—the voice of a gentleman, a clergyman, a divinity tutor, or professor, or something at Oxford,—begging to be informed what the lesson was. “The Thirty-nine Harticles, sir!” called out Mrs. Dawes (her h’s were by no means perfect). “Oh!” was the only comment. My dear, have you ever studied the possibilities of satire that lie within that little interjection? Our American friends say that we manage to give it a tone of contempt peculiar to ourselves. Anyhow, I closed the book, nearly fell to the ground in my haste to descend from my elevated position, and rushed out of the room with a sense of the most abject humiliation. And that was the end of my attempt to meet the requirements of an inspector.’

‘But the children,—how did they get on?’

‘Perfectly well. The inspector, when he came, knew his depth better than I knew mine, and they were never examined in anything beyond twice two and c a t, cat. In fact, it was all a farce from beginning to end. And so we went back to the knitting and samplers, and the “busy bee,” and were as merry as gfrigs and as ignorant as donkeys, till our new rector appeared on the stage.’

‘And the school is under the government now, I suppose?’

‘Oh yes! under government, and very well spoken of. We were never disgraced but once, and that was about two years ago by a pupil teacher, who could not explain

the meaning of periphrasis. As it is, we are not so very learned, only we are very good and proper. We always move in time, and put our hands behind our backs precisely at the same moment; and our little girls make beautiful curtseys, after a pattern of the rector's own. They say he gives them private lessons on Saturday afternoons. And our little boys take their caps off instead of pulling their front locks. Nothing, you see, to be alarmed at; though we are a model school in every one's eyes, but poor Lady Anson's.'

'I feel for her,' I said, 'all the more, because it really seems she has nothing to complain of.'

'Nothing but the samplers. That was the unkindest cut of all. In old Mrs. Dawes' time they did produce such beautiful samplers! All worked in variegated lines, blue, and red, and green, and a scripture text at the bottom, and the names in full length, date and age. There is scarcely a cottage in the village in which you will not find one hung up for ornament, and looked upon with such pride! But our present mistress, Miss Sandham, scoffs at samplers, and when Lady Anson, in her last attempt to maintain her supremacy, at least in the work line, proposed a prize for the best-worked sampler, and offered kindly to help the children to choose the texts, she was answered with, "Oh, my lady! very sorry to disoblige your ladyship, but samplers are quite gone by." At which Lady Anson was very indignant, and made an appeal to the rector, who put on his considering face, meditated for at least a minute, and then solemnly decided, "Since the introduction of marking-ink, I esteem button-holes more highly."'

'But you don't mean to say,' I said, 'that these trifles really have caused a serious feud between the Ansons and Mr. L'Estrange?'

‘It depends upon what you call serious. They don’t actually fight, and I believe they do bow to each other; but wait, and see for yourself. You are a school teacher. Keep friends with them both, if you can.’

‘You manage it,’ I said, ‘why should not I?’

‘I beg your pardon, that is precisely what I do not. They both hate me with the most perfect Christian hatred, which means, that you won’t do any harm to a person yourself, but that you are not sorry to see it done by others.’

‘I don’t believe that,’ I said.

‘Well, don’t. Perhaps it was an exaggeration; only, honestly, they don’t love me; and I really do love them, if they would but believe it. Lady Anson is a pattern Lady Bountiful, and as for the rector, I never quiz him without doing penance for it afterwards, especially if I happen to have been into any of the cottages; for he is a saint there, however much of a sinner he may be elsewhere. Now, what do you look so grave for? He is a sinner, isn’t he?’

‘I suppose so,’ I said, ‘if he is like the rest of his fellow-creatures; but really, as you take upon yourself to speak your mind, I must have the privilege of doing the same; and so I just ask you not to talk in this random way about the clergyman of the parish, before Ina and Cecil, or indeed before any of the children. It must lessen their respect.’

‘Now, my dear Mrs. Anstruther, after all, you are no wiser than your neighbours. What is respect worth if it can’t stand a little bantering? Put a surplice on our worthy friend and set him in the reading desk, and he is transformed into an angel, and I would not for the world laugh at him. I don’t say so much of the pulpit. He is rather human there; he can’t help it, poor man. But

take off the surplice, and then I don't see why I am not as good as he, considering that sense is of no sex.'

'I am not going to argue with you,' I said; 'there are some things which won't stand argument, or at least superficial argument,—and, just now, there is no time for more,—but which yet one feels to be wise, and this is one of them. It may be all very well for you and me to talk over Mr. L'Estrange, and even to quiz him a little for his peculiarities, because we really can separate the man from his office. But I do not think it is good for the children; it must, to a certain extent, lower him in their sight, and so diminish his influence.'

'But truth, truth?'

'Truth lies deeper, I suspect, than we are inclined to imagine. I should look for a man's true character in his principles and not in his little eccentricities. And so, when you laugh at Mr. L'Estrange, you must forgive me for saying that I am convinced you give an untrue impression of him.'

'Socrates, Plato, Solomon, they were nothing to you,' exclaimed Mrs. Bradshaw. 'It is the very concentrated essence of wisdom! But it must be diluted, for weak minds like mine. Don't be afraid though;—and please don't look so, or I shall infallibly have to go home and do penance, and I do detest that. By the by, talking of penance, do you dine with the Ansons on Tuesday week?'

'I have not been invited.'

'But you will be; shall you go?'

'I must consider; I rather think I must decline dinner parties.'

'I won't attempt to influence you by giving you my opinion of them, or you will turn into Solomon again. Only one thing I must warn you to remember, if you do

dine there, that Sir John keeps his clock half-an-hour faster than the church.'

'What for, possibly?'

'Church and State can't agree, that's all. But I won't say a word more, it's naughty. Good-bye. I have a world of things to say to you, but I have forgotten them all.'

CHAPTER XIV.

October 5.—I have established some poetry readings ; it was the only thing to do. Lending ‘Tennyson’ has led, as I imagined it would, to a more frequent and more intimate intercourse with Woodleigh than I think satisfactory ; so I have taken the matter into my own hands, and since Tennyson is the idol of the hour, I have accepted him. I read to them last week the ‘Morte d’Arthur’ and the ‘Lotos Eaters,’ and to-day we began with ‘The May Queen ;’ and then I thought I would try them with something a little more difficult, so I chose ‘The Two Voices,’ and read on, watching their faces covertly, to see how much they were all taking in, for I had a full congregation — Marietta, Ina, Cecil, and Agnes ; the latter, of course, from her own choice entirely. I did not believe she would care for, or indeed understand, what we were reading. Marietta fixed those melancholy eyes of hers upon me, and gave her whole energy to the task of comprehension, and was evidently touched and interested ; but the Italian quickness was tried, I could see, by the abstruseness of the argument, and the necessity for attention. Ina listened, and said, it was very pretty, which was just what I did not wish her to say. Cecil stopped me, every now and then, to ask questions, and shook her head, and owned she did not understand ; and Agnes sat perfectly motionless, looking down upon the carpet till I had ended, and then, as I was going to put away the book, stole up to my side and whispered : ‘Mamma, may I come next time ? It sounds like a Sun-

day thing.' I doubt if I shall try them again as yet with any piece of that character. Minds develope so differently, and at such various ages. Theirs seem scarcely prepared for anything so abstruse; and my object in the poetry readings is not to make them philosophers, or even to teach them to think (I must use other books for that purpose), but to sympathise with their tastes, and so draw out their confidence.

We had only just finished when Mrs. Randolph called for Marietta to go for a drive with her. She certainly is, in appearance, a very striking, almost a fascinating, woman; and though one may find fault with her style of dress, it is unquestionably extremely becoming. She wore to-day a very rich Turkish scarf—not in the slightest degree in the fashion—she professes to laugh at fashion—but most gracefully folded round her; a magnificent black silk, and a white bonnet, with a little wreath of brilliant crimson flowers round it. Marietta tells me that her fondness for colour is quite a passion. Flowers or bright ribbons she must have. I should think less of all this, but that these dress fancies seem almost a mania with her, and Marietta insensibly thinks and talks of them as if they were really important; and then Ina, I can see, is led on to imitate them in small ways. I have given her an allowance, and Cecil is to have one next year, if she can learn to dress herself neatly; and having once made them independent, I do not mean to interfere with them more than I can possibly help. Ina already begins to indulge various little whims in the way of fashion and ornament; and I felt sure to-day, when I saw the crimson wreath, that, before long, she would have something of the same kind. Mrs. Randolph was apparently, and at first, in one of her most gracious moods. She said she was afraid I should spoil Marietta, by petting her so much, but it was a great relief to her that the child (as

she called her, though Marietta is eighteen) should have such charming companions.

'I was,' I said, 'glad we could give her any pleasure;' and when the cold words, spoken in the coldest tone, came out, I saw Marietta, who was watching me, change colour. I could not help adding then: 'We are as fond of Marietta as she can possibly be of us.'

Ina looked at Marietta, and smiled, and Marietta brightened; but her quick eye still glanced from one to the other, as Mrs. Randolph and I continued our conversation.

'You make such a dear party with the little ones,' continued Mrs. Randolph, as she saw Hugh and Essie running about in the garden. 'I wish you would let the little pets come in and see me. I am so passionately devoted to children.'

Then came a deep sigh, without any affectation. Victor is at last gone to school, and she feels her loss, so Marietta says, terribly.

I said I would bring the children in with me some day.

'Ah! but not that only; send them in with the nurse, or without the nurse. Let them come to-morrow; no, not to-morrow—I go to Westford to-morrow—but the next day. It must be the next day; I may have friends with me and interruptions afterwards. Yes, they must come.'

Marietta interposed, hurriedly: 'But, Aunt Julia, we were to be alone all next week. There are no visitors so soon. If you remember, you said so.'

'Did I? Perhaps yes, perhaps no; we shall see. Mrs. Anstruther, I may have the pets, I am sure?'

Essie ran into the room, and Mrs. Randolph held out her hands to her. 'Come, sweet one! Just say how d'ye do.' Children have such an instinct as to the persons who are really fond of them; and Essie ran up to Mrs.

Randolph, and held up her little face to be kissed, and Hugh stood wondering and admiring at a distance, and then drew nearer; and soon Essie was seated in Mrs. Randolph's lap, and playing with the ornaments which hung from her chain, whilst Hugh was pulling at her eye-glass, both in a state of supreme felicity.

Very different from Marietta. Simple, natural, and kind as all this was, so much so indeed, that, with all my incipient distrust and dislike, I could not see the slightest cause for annoyance; yet Marietta evidently was annoyed, and could not conceal it. She sat by chafing, patting her foot on the ground impatiently, and every now and then making some little move to go, of which Mrs. Randolph took not the slightest notice. She went on playing with the children, and telling them stories; and the little peculiarities of intonation which, without being exaggerated, gave a certain tone of quaintness to her words, imparted a zest to everything she said. Ina, I perceived, was very much attracted by her. She went up to her, and joined in the little talking and play with the children. As she was kneeling down by Mrs. Randolph's side, the latter looked earnestly at her, and said:

'Turn your face round, dear, that I may look at you more closely.'

Ina obeyed; and I saw tears, actual tears, glistening in Mrs. Randolph's eyes, as she murmured:

'So like—yes, so like——. Ah! you should have been named Katharine.'

'It is my second name,' replied Ina.

'Is it? Then it is a bond of union. I had a little Katharine once of my own, but God took her from me. Ah! Mrs. Anstruther'—and she turned to me—'I trust to you that I may see your darlings; they will do me good; I am sure they will do me good,' she repeated more eagerly. 'Only,' and her voice sank, 'they make me

sad—sorrowful.—what it is good for us all to be; what I must be.’

Oh, how I longed to be an impulsive person, able to respond from the feeling of the moment, and not compelled to make, as it were, a calculation of affection from the average. Mrs. Randolph may have disliked me then, but it could not possibly have been as much as I disliked myself, when I said:

‘I am afraid I can scarcely let the little ones pay visits without me; but I will bring them on the first day I can.’

‘A visit! Oh, you must not call it a visit. Let them come in just as they are, and play about; and I have such pretty things to show them,—such a beautiful great dog, Hugh; and, Essie, such lovely little shining fish! And, you know,’ continued Mrs. Randolph, turning again to me, ‘their grandmother wishes it, so I have a kind of claim.’

It was all I could do to answer quietly, ‘These are not Mrs. Penryhn’s grandchildren;’ and, as I said this, I saw Ina’s lip curl, and her eye caught Cecil’s; but Cecil looked up at me, and when she read my countenance, as I am sure she did, she stole to my side, and took her work, and sat down by me.

Mrs. Randolph blushed and apologized, and said she ought to have remembered; and then, with still worse tact, she went on to urge upon me that Ina and Cecil ought, at least, to be allowed to come and see her; that, in fact, it was a duty on my part to allow it.

I could but say, ‘Thank you;’ and ‘I feared they were very much occupied;’ but it would not do. The matter was pressed more and more; and, as I grew colder, Mrs. Randolph grew warmer. It was simply the case of a determined, excited will. She could have had no possible object in insisting upon the point, but she could not bear con-

tradiction, and I imagine she is proud, and suspected my reasons for holding back. I was vexed beyond expression. Cecil, without saying a word to me, went to the two little ones, and whispered that nurse was waiting for them, and carried them off. Ina seated herself by Marietta, who nervously clutched the handle of her parasol, and pressed her lips together, and frowned, but did not attempt to say anything. It was one of the most painful scenes I ever went through, and I felt that every effort I made to keep my own temper only aggravated Mrs. Randolph more; and at length came out the fact, that Mrs. Penryhn had written to her, complaining of me, and saying that my one object was to undermine her in her grandchildren's affections.

When it came to this, I had no alternative but to say that such remarks were unfit for the hearing of either Ina or Marietta, and to beg them to leave the room. Marietta rushed away without glancing at me; Ina followed very slowly, and not without looking back and making a half bow to Mrs. Randolph.

When we were left alone, we had such a scene! To describe it would be quite impossible. I never knew before what an angry woman could be. But it seemed to me more than anger, it was all but madness. There was no attempt at reason; it was merely a storm of words, assertions, accusations. What I had to do with it was more than I could possibly imagine. And at the end there was a burst of hysterical tears, and I was obliged to summon poor Marietta, and leave her with her aunt. They were in possession of the drawing-room for at least half an hour, and then Marietta came to my door, and,—trembling and shy, and, as I could see, utterly miserable,—begged me to let her have a little laudanum. 'Her aunt had sent her; she must ask for it, for nothing else would do.'

'I gave it; I had no choice. Marietta only said 'we must never come near you again,' and hurried off before I had time to answer her.

And this is my next door-neighbour, and Mrs. Penryhn's friend!

October 8th.—This interference of Mrs. Penryhn's will do more harm than I could have foreseen. I hoped that Marietta being, as she is, so very wise and right-minded, we might have kept up a fair amount of intimacy, without any mischief arising from it; but I see that Ina will not be content with this. She is continually harping upon the wish expressed in her grandmamma's note; and the scene of the other day has not made the impression upon her that I hoped it would, because she attributes it to nervousness and excitability, and she has adopted the idea that Mrs. Randolph is ill-treated; why or wherefore I cannot imagine, for I am sure Marietta would never have talked to her about her aunt; and, indeed, Marietta's prejudices are all in favour of Mr. Randolph. Anyhow, this is Ina's tone at present, and, as a consequence, she always takes Mrs. Randolph's side, if anything is said or hinted about her which is not quite favourable; and though I do my very utmost to avoid the subject, yet it is not possible to do so always.

If I give my reasons for not liking anything Mrs. Randolph says or does, then Ina is silent, and her pretty mouth assumes a look of martyr-like acquiescence, which is secretly 'of the same opinion still.' The inevitable result of all this, is to create an unacknowledged, but most real and unfortunate, barrier between us. I have not been to call on Mrs. Randolph again, neither have I sent the children. After the exhibition at her last visit, I really could not do it. Neither Marietta nor Ina, however, know how far she really went on that occasion, and it is impossible for me to explain; and

so poor Marietta, who cannot bear anything like estrangement between us, and really believes that the little ones would amuse and soothe her aunt, begs me, earnestly, to forget what has passed, and let her take them in just for ten minutes; and, then again, when I refuse, Ina sympathises with Marietta's disappointment, and looks upon me, I am afraid, as a kind of gaoler.

Ina's mind is narrow, and she has a most determined will under a most quiet exterior, and I suspect she must have been strongly prejudiced against me at some period. I cannot account otherwise for this most unfortunate development of independence. I only trust it will not show itself in action, but I do not feel safe. As for independent opinions, and tastes, and friendships, all girls have them, and would be worth little if they had not; what I fear, is the wilful determination to indulge them, at all risks, and against all cautions. Some persons would trouble themselves about affection and confidence, but that will all come right in time. A step-mother's position is most awkward; one has, as it were, to fight one's way, step by step, through an enemy's country. Singularly enough, I have no fear with Cecil; we met and understood each other at once. My only trouble with her is with her habits of carelessness, and desultoriness, and the absence of attention at her lessons. She can do everything well, and very often she does nothing well. We have many little quarrels upon this point, but Cecil is always bright and good-humoured. I tell her that she and Charley are very much alike, for I have just the same complaints of him from Mr. Pierce. I only wish I could be sure that he would take reproof as well as Cecil; but, since I am not sure at all, I say but little in my letters to him, in the way of fault-finding. Lectures from a distance never do good; they always seem unjust, and, when I have him at home with me again, I shall be able to soften what

may appear hard, by tenderness of manner. The loss of a father is so very grievous for a boy, one does not, in the least, know how to make up for it. Certainly, I don't think it is possible to do so, by taking upon oneself a tone of severity which is forced.

The invitation to the Manor has come, as Mrs. Bradshaw said it would, and I have accepted it. It was a matter of considerable deliberation, for I have hitherto refused all invitations, on the plea of not being settled in my new house, and being uncertain whether I should go out at all. I see that doing so will involve me in inconveniences; and yet, I believe, it will be best. If I give up society entirely now, I shall find it difficult to take my place in it by-and-by, when I desire to do so for the children's sake. And I am not likely to go out much; I shall not dine out in Westford. But by meeting my friends in Dernham occasionally, I shall keep up our mutual interests, and prevent myself, I hope, from growing singular and exclusive. I think, too, that I can make society useful to the children; they will talk and think of the persons amongst whom they live, and it is only by mixing with these persons myself that I can at all direct this natural curiosity and interest into a safe channel. Going out will involve, now and then, giving a little dinner party; but I mean to ask people to come to me in my own way—three or four at a time—and, in spite of Dr. Johnson's assertion, 'that people always expect to have something better abroad than they can get at home,' I shall not try to rival Mr. Harcourt's man-cook.

When I mentioned to Ina and Cecil, that I was to dine at the Manor on Tuesday, they both groaned in dismay; and I confess to being heartily pleased that they should so miss me.

‘Quite in earnest.’

‘Then you really are an unutterable goose; and I don’t beg your pardon for saying so.’

‘Thank you. Pardon is granted, though it is not asked for; but just tell me why I am a goose.’

‘Because you are encouraging this man, this most excellent, worthy, pains-taking, but most idiotic rector, in wearing out the spirits and patience of all the unhappy little children in the parish. Why, they hate Sunday; they loathe it.’

‘I am very sorry for it,’ I said; ‘but it is not my responsibility.’

‘Except so far as you assist. I should have given you a warning the other day, as to what you were to expect, only I supposed that, as a matter of course, you would rebel.’

‘I never see that any good is gained by rebellion,’ I said; ‘I believe that, putting aside the question of right, more good is done by working under authority than against it.’

‘Well! you are infinitely better than I am, that is all I can say. As for rebellion, I believe I was born for it; I have done nothing but rebel ever since I was a baby; and I don’t see, myself, how the world is to get on without it. My son declares I should have been turned out of the army, if I had ever been in it; but I say, it is the only discipline to which I should ever have brought myself to submit, because it involves questions of life and death. Any how, I am a rebel, and never shall be anything else.’

‘And the result is that the Sunday-school tumbles to pieces,’ I said.

‘Even so; but it is not my fault. You think it is, I see, by the twist of your mouth; but there we differ.’

‘I don’t wish to argue,’ I said; ‘but it strikes me that

if we wait for work till it is arranged just according to our own fancy, we might sit with our hands before us all our lives.'

'And, possibly, be doing more good than by working in a wrong way.'

'Not a wrong way, only perhaps not just the very wisest and best.'

'That which is not right must be wrong,' persisted Mrs. Bradshaw.

I laughed as I said, 'Is not the question rather whether that can be good which is not best?' I think Mrs. Bradshaw was a little put out, for she turned away as if intending to walk on and leave me. But almost immediately recovering herself, she came back and said, 'You make me cross. If you are going to uphold the rector in his vagaries, there will be no hope of doing anything with him.'

'Who is to be rector when he is deposed?' I said. 'Lady Anson?'

'Poor silly little woman! no! indeed!'

'Mrs. Bradshaw?'

'Well, yes, perhaps so; but if I could only have things my own way, I would let him be rector still. I know that sounds like egregious nonsense, but I always make a point of saying out what I really wish and mean, and then I don't deceive myself. And I have no great love of power really, though no doubt I seem to have. If things can only be done in the right way, I don't care who does them; but it does try me to see a man so bent upon doing them the wrong way as the rector is.'

'But just tell me, in what does this very wrong consist? In giving me a book of Questions, from which I am to examine the children?'

'That is a specimen. He won't leave any of us to ourselves. He is the very embodiment of *red-tapism*. All

things must be done according to his settled method. There is not a single loop-hole left for independence. And people won't stand this; at least, unless they look upon him as Solomon, which I confess I don't.'

'I mean to stand it,' I said; 'and what is more, I mean to make Ina stand it. I shall bring her with me next Sunday, if the rector will allow it.'

'Then I shall just cut your acquaintance, for you are the most provoking woman I know.'

'Very sorry, but, like yourself, I always say out just what I mean. I don't like the rector's way of managing the schools.'

'I dislike *red tape* just as much as you do. But, as there is no sin in it, and the responsibility is his, I have nothing to do but to submit, and, perhaps, by-and-by, if I throw myself into his ways, he will be induced to throw himself into mine.'

'I congratulate you on your hope, and the prospect of a speedy fulfilment. But you must understand that, by thus siding with the rector, you will have all Dernham against you.'

'I hope not, seeing I have no intention of siding with any one. I simply intend to continue my class in the Sunday-school.'

'And so entirely to defeat our plans. We have struck, one and all, except those two girls, the Masons, whom you saw there. We must have brought him round eventually. All we want is, to have no Sunday afternoon school, and to be allowed to teach our classes, to a certain extent, our own way; though, of course, according to a certain order; and not to be obliged to weary the children with those dreadful little books with strings of references. If you will only just decline teaching in the school till these points are yielded, he must give in.'

'With a bad grace, and dislike us.'

‘Oh, never mind the dislike; it will not kill any of us. And really, I rebel on principle. I do object to being clergyman-ridden.’

‘Just as the rector objects to being lady-ridden. But seriously; I go with you entirely in your object, only I differ from you as to the mode of obtaining it. Mr. L’Estrange is just one of those very excellent and very determined men, who will hold to his own opinion all the more for being contradicted. One can see it by his mouth. I venture to say, that every time you protest against the little books, he makes a memorandum to order more copies.’

‘Man’s perversity,’ murmured Mrs. Bradshaw.

‘Human perversity. But, whatever it may be, there is not the least use in fighting against it. One can but endeavour to get the better of it unperceived.’

‘Which is, to my mind, humbug,’ exclaimed Mrs. Bradshaw. ‘It is a very ugly word, and I use it only in the parliamentary sense. But still, that sort of management is to me humbug. Let me agree with people, or disagree. I can’t do both. Let me be a friend or an enemy. I am disappointed in you, and that is the truth. Good-bye.’

The tone of vexation was so real, that I could not help being vexed too. ‘Good-bye,’ I said; ‘you will think ill of me for a month or two, and then, when I have brought Mr. L’Estrange round, you will see I have done a good deed, and we shall be friends again.’

She held out her hand to me. ‘I can’t wait so long as that for friendship; I like you too well. If I didn’t, I should quarrel with you, and abuse you behind your back. As it is, I tell you to your face, that you are going to work quite the wrong way.’

‘Only, if it should reach the right end, you will be satisfied. You see I must have the last word. Good-bye once more.’

CHAPTER XVI.

October 18. My first Dernham dinner party.—I disliked the idea of the children's being alone; but as we did not dine till half-past seven, and Ina and Cecil go to bed at nine, it was really not leaving them for very long.

The Manor is a handsome old house, not large, Elizabethan, and rather gloomy, and lying low, so that it does not command much view—but one does not care for that at a dinner party—and everything about it is especially comfortable, without being at all grand. Sir John is in his element when he has to exercise hospitality, and Lady Anson's genuine good nature—or rather, perhaps, her benevolence—makes her a very pleasant hostess. Only one unfortunate individual was destined to have but little benefit, either from hospitable or benevolent feelings,—the rector. I did not expect to see him there. I fancied that the feud would have prevented it. But Mrs. Bradshaw came up to me almost as soon as I entered the room, and murmured, 'We shall have a scene. State clock and Church clock!' and when I looked at her for an explanation, she added, 'Our worthy rector has not dined here for six months; but since we of the Sunday-school have taken the upper hand and struck, we are all good-humoured again, and so he has been invited. He would have done wisely to decline, though, if he means to keep Sir John waiting for dinner.'

Every one except Mr. L'Estrange had arrived when Mrs. Bradshaw said this, for I was nearly the last. There were the Harcourts, and two or three Westford

people, whom I did not know ; a tall Mr. Digby, who wore spectacles, and looked clever, but cynical ; and of the home party, a young Mr. Anson—Harry, as his father calls him, and the eldest of the Miss Ansons,—Edith, a girl of about seventeen, very like her mother, well dressed and pretty to look at, very silent and dull to talk to ; last, though not least, as regards my interest, we had, in addition to Mrs. Bradshaw and myself, Marietta Randolph, looking really beautiful. I had never seen her dressed for an evening before, and she quite startled me when I first saw her. She was so very much more striking than any one else in the room. Blue, her favourite colour, suits her particularly well, and she had her hair drawn off her face in a way which would not suit every one ; it might, in some cases, look bold ; but Marietta is so essentially simple and retiring in manner and expression, that she can bear what in others would be unendurable. I could see traces of Mrs. Randolph's eccentric taste in one or two minor matters : the way, for instance, in which she had intertwined pearls, and a kind of blue braid with her hair, so as to make bows hanging low down on the neck ; but it harmonised with her general foreign look. Marietta's eyes always enchant me ; there is such wonderful depth in them ; and the long lashes fringing them, make one long to look under and into them. And then she is apparently so perfectly unconscious of her beauty. There are none of those languid glances, and up-turnings and down-turnings of the lovely eyes, which, in so many cases, utterly destroy their loveliness. She thinks so little about her appearance, that she might almost be accused of coldness, or even pride ; but it is shyness, which gives her the appearance of coldness. When once at ease, her face lightens up, and the expression changes with a rapidity which enables one often to read at a glance all that she thinks and feels. Mrs. Brad-

shaw brought her, and I could see, poor child! that she was rather alarmed, and yet amused and pleased. She has seen but little of English society, and that not always of the best kind; and she is so innately refined, that she requires an atmosphere of perfect good breeding to enable her to expand naturally. Whatever else the Ansons may be, they certainly are—I was going to say, well-bred, but I doubt if I can say that with truth, after the very singular display of antagonism between Church and State, which we had before dinner.

The time-piece struck the half-hour, and dinner was announced. Sir John looked at his watch.

‘The rector is late,’ was his remark, and a solemn silence fell upon the company.

Then came low murmurings, examination of watches, excuses, suppositions. Sir John sat upright in his arm-chair, his watch in his hand. Some looked at the door, some would have looked at the window, but the curtains were drawn. Mrs. Bradshaw, who was next me, murmured—

‘The rector will do well to make the most of his dinner here to-day, for he will never have another.’

The muttered conversation dropped at the moment she spoke, and nothing could rouse it again. I don’t know what possessed us, whether it was the sight of Sir John’s portly figure and looming brows, as he sat looking at his grandfather’s old-fashioned watch, and marking the slow minutes as they went by; but I am sure we all felt like children at school, waiting for a companion who is about to receive a lecture. I was severe upon the rector in my own mind, and blamed him unmercifully. We scarcely waited more than twenty minutes; but it seemed like an hour. Lady Anson gently suggested, once or twice, that it would be better not to wait; but Sir John was immovable. At length, the door was thrown open

very wide, and the butler announced, in a tone of peculiar asperity—‘Mr. L’Estrange.’ The poor rector hurried in, looking very hot, and very nervous. He glanced round the room, from one to the other, searching, I fancied, in vain for a friend. When his eye caught Mrs. Bradshaw, who was standing rather prominently forward, I suspect a little pride came to his support, for he drew himself up, stalked up to Lady Anson, and began his apology.

‘Ring the bell, Harry,’ said Sir John. It was answered instantly. ‘Dinner,’ said Sir John. And then came a momentary dead silence.

‘I am afraid I am late, Sir John,’ began the rector.

‘If you wish to know how late, sir, I can tell you. Precisely twenty minutes.’ And Sir John held out his watch.

I looked at the rector, and, for the first time, admired him. He never lost his courtesy, even in tone, but merely said—

‘Young George Mason died an hour ago, and I was with him.’

I think Sir John was touched, though he would not show it. As Mrs. Bradshaw said to me afterwards: ‘If it had been any one but a Mason, the excuse would have been more than accepted. But the Masons are of the rector’s faction.’

Still, it was impossible not to be somewhat mollified. I confess, thinking of my own afternoon’s employment—for I had been giving myself a holiday, and reading a novel—I felt rather self-condemned; unnecessarily, perhaps, but still I had no right to judge the rector so hardly. We went into dinner, I scarcely know how, for Lady Anson’s very low voice was not heard when she attempted to marshal us. I believe I was intended for the rector, being supposed to have rather partizan tendencies; at least, Lady Anson looked at me as if I were a kind of stray

sheep, who had got into the wrong fold; but, somehow, I found myself by the side of Mr. Digby, with Marietta and Mr. L'Estrange opposite. I was glad, for I did not desire a conversation upon matters which in such society might have been awkward; and Marietta, who was evidently desirous to soothe the rector's fretted nerves, must have been much more agreeable to him, with her captivating smile and bright conversation, than I with my solemnities. Mr. Digby was amusing; a little satirical, not a little conceited. He is in some public office in London, and I suspect he is also a reviewer, of some kind. He glanced over the surface of several of the subjects introduced, pursuing them for two or three minutes, and then turning them over, and disposing of them in few words, just as one might imagine a reviewer would dispose of a pile of new books. Education, I found, was his hobby. He really thought himself strong upon that, and, to my extreme amazement, he believed that I considered myself strong upon it also. How he came to know or think anything about me I cannot imagine, for he can scarcely have heard my name before; but with an insinuating smile, and that lowered tone of voice which a man adopts when he feels that he is about to condescend to the level of a woman's mind, he said:—

‘You interest yourself deeply in education, I believe.’

‘Every one must,’ I said, ‘who has six children to bring up.’

‘But public education—its condition in England at the present time—what do you think of it?’

‘Are you a member of the Education Committee?’ I said.

He laughed. ‘You don’t wish to betray yourself. But you need not be afraid, I am not the Lion, but only the Lion’s Provider. I like to get all the opinions and information I can.’

‘And you promise me that I shall not appear as evidence in a Blue Book?’

‘Assuredly. I have nothing to do with Blue Books.’

‘Or with any books?’ I said.

He was silent, and I repeated the question.

‘I am a wise man,’ was the reply. ‘I know how to keep my own secrets.’

‘And so do I. And, therefore, I mean to keep to myself what I think about public education; because, if I were to say it, you would discover that I knew nothing at all about it.’

‘Too humble, for a lady devoting herself to children, working in schools, interesting herself in all the intellectual movements of the age! You must have some opinions.’

‘No,’ I said; ‘an opinion is a result from facts. If you have no facts, you can have no opinions.’

‘You think differently from the generality of your sex,’ he said. ‘Ladies’ opinions, apart from facts, meet me everywhere.’

If there is one thing I dislike more than another, it is discussing with men what women think and feel. I am so often inclined to parody the song, and say, ‘It’s a pity when charming men talk of things that they don’t understand;’ and Mr. Digby is one of those essentially patronising men who irritate me into a self-assertion, which afterwards makes me vexed with myself. As for my opinion about public education, he did not care one iota about it; all he wanted was an opportunity for stating his own; and Mr. L’Estrange, from the opposite side of the table, having caught the word education, rushed after it like a dog who has started a hare, and, by asking a question about some new educational journal which has just been published, took the conversation out of my hands, greatly to my relief. Cant topics, let them be never so interesting in them-

selves, always, to a certain degree, weary me ; and this one of education, is really so vast and deep that one finds oneself continually floundering in it, with the hopeless feeling of never being able to reach firm ground. The very word education at a dinner party tempts me to say : ‘ A little more mutton, if you please ’—and turn the conversation.

But it was very amusing to listen to two fairly clever men discussing it ; all the more, because now and then, when they touched upon the education of girls, they talked such utter nonsense ; and one was able to sit by, apparently engrossed with an ice-cream, and make private comments for one’s own edification. I could see that Marietta was as amused as myself. Our eyes met occasionally and involuntarily, and then I could read in hers the interest with which she listened, especially when the rector spoke ; for she looks to him as her great friend, and is not half as alive to his eccentricities as the rest of the Dernham world are. He really is, in many respects, a sensible man, and, I am sure, a very good one. If it were not for the *red tape*, I think I could almost be fond of him, he is so thoroughly in earnest. His hobby is, order ; Mr. Digby’s, science. Both mean to regenerate the world. They reminded me of, ‘ There’s nothing like leather ’ for the defence of a city. Mr. Digby was especially strong, and at last infinitely absurd. He had lately been in a village where all the young girls made first-rate nursery maids ; why or wherefore, no one could understand. The schoolmistress was nothing particular, the children were in no way remarkable. At last, he discovered that they had been taught botany ! A professor in the neighbourhood, interested in the school, had taken pains with them in this one branch of science, and so had enlarged their minds. The good nursery maids were the result of the botanical lessons.

The assertion was made in the most perfect good faith. There was not the smallest perception of the ludicrous in it. And the rector was perfectly solemn also, and received it as an idea worthy of consideration.

Henry Anson, who had heard part of the conversation, now joined in, and begged to be told what was this new receipt for nursery maids. Mr. Digby answered rather shortly, and young Anson burst into a fit of laughter.

‘What’s the joke?’ called out Sir John from the bottom of the table.

Henry Anson was laughing too much to speak, so I explained as well as I could; and Sir John’s intense stolidity only made matters more absurd.

‘Botany! Nursery maids! I don’t understand. What have they to do with each other?’

‘Precisely,’ I said. ‘What have they to do with each other? We want Mr. Digby to explain.’

Mrs. Bradshaw, in her gravest tone, remarked that she had gained quite a new insight into cause and effect. She had always imagined that godliness, common sense, and habits of cleanliness, were at the root of a good nursery maid’s character; but no doubt she was mistaken, and certainly botany would be more easily acquired. Would Mr. Digby say whether he had found the Linnæan or Natural system most adapted for the formation of the nursery maid mind?

A burst of laughter from the whole table followed the question, and the conversation became general, every one trying to say something absurd. Marietta was especially merry. She had Mrs. Bradshaw and Henry Anson near her, and they drew her on, and I really felt obliged to them, for, without their help, I should never have known how quick and amusing she can be. As for Mr. Digby, he was not in the least set down. He looked upon us, I am sure, as a set of ignorant all-but idiots, and I have no

doubt he took notes of us—which will be made useful in his next review.

A curious thought came across me once; that the rector did not quite like Marietta's being so taken up by others. I saw him watching her, and, in his shy way, trying every now and then to bring back her attention to himself; but when he found it useless he sank back in his chair with a kind of resigned air, which awoke my pity, and made me talk to him a little myself. Not, I imagine, that he was at all obliged to me. I dare say he would have been better pleased to listen to Marietta, or, at least, to look at her; but I could not bear to see him stranded, as it were, on the shore, while all the other barks had floated off so gaily. I can so well understand the half paternal, half romantic, interest with which a middle-aged bachelor regards a bright gay girl like Marietta; but he must be prepared for her neglecting him in society. She is so very attractive, and is sure to excite notice wherever she is; and though she does not flirt in the least, yet she has just that kind of foreign freedom which carries her beyond what a thorough English girl would do or say. I observed this, especially, in her manner to Mr. Anson. If it had been Ina, I should have been fretted, for there would have been a little too much ease, and I should have seen that there was a decided wish to be singular. But it is impossible to have such a thought with Marietta. Let her laugh and talk, and be as excited as she may, she is always simple, and I do not believe that she was in the slightest degree aware that Mr. Anson was admiring her. He certainly was, though, and, what is more, I am sure Lady Anson saw it. He would have devoted himself to Marietta when the gentlemen came into the drawing-room after dinner, but Lady Anson kept him in attendance upon herself and Mrs. Harcourt for some time; and then, when music began, and

Marietta was asked to sing, Lady Anson made an excuse to draw him from the piano. She is right, so far as the world goes. It would not be a marriage that she could approve, looking at Sir John's standing in the county, and the doubtful position which Mrs. Randolph holds; to say nothing of the fact that money, I suspect, is wanted, and that Marietta, I imagine, has very little. But she would make a fascinating daughter-in-law. She was not in good voice to-night. The rector stalked up to the piano, and asked her to try 'Auld Robin Grey,' and I think it worried her. She made some excuse, and chose an Italian song instead, and I was sorry for it, for I think Mr. L'Estrange was disappointed; and 'Auld Robin Grey' suits her particularly.

I have said nothing of the Harcourts, *à propos* to the evening, because there really is nothing to be said, except to marvel at their dress. I honestly confess I don't understand it. They are said to have been carefully brought up; people talk of them, indeed, as patterns of propriety. They are severe in their censure of anything which is called indecorous, in manner or tone, and, though personally distasteful to me, they are, for aught I know to the contrary, good people; but they dress in a way in which I should really object to appear before my maid. What they think of themselves, when they look in the glass, I can't conceive. Mrs. Bradshaw murmured to me, as we sat behind the piano, looking at the wide expanse of back which Miss Lydia Harcourt displayed, 'My dear, we really must ask the rector to preach a sermon for her; winter is coming on, and she has not clothes to cover her.' Mrs. Harcourt swims and twists less in the evening than she does at a morning visit. I talked very little to her, and scolded myself for not doing so, but she says everything with such an effort and drawl, that it takes all nature out of her conversation,

and then I really do not know how to answer. Perhaps I am a little inclined to be hard upon her, because I could not help hearing her say to Lady Anson, as she was looking at me, 'commonplace.' I dare say it is true, and I ought not to care, but I do.

We had a stupid evening, happily short. People looked over photographs, and talked in low tones till the music began, and then there was a murmur which prevented one from listening and enjoying. Marietta's singing was the only thing I cared for; Miss Anson and Miss Harcourt went through a kind of race on the piano, which made one think of Dr. Johnson's wish, that it had been impossible; though it had one advantage, for it gave Marietta the opportunity of saying a few words privately to the rector, which she told me before she very much wished to do. I suspect they must have had reference to her aunt, for I saw his face become very grave and earnest directly; and Mrs. Bradshaw informed me that there had been a terrible outbreak at Woodleigh only this afternoon; something, I believe, connected with Lady Chase and the proposed visit.

CHAPTER XVII.

October 19.—I have been so little accustomed to society that I felt quite dissipated this morning, after dining out and being so late last night. And it seemed as if the dissipation was to continue, for, unlike our usual habits, we went into Westford for shopping this afternoon, and met all the gay world, both of Westford and Dernham. I meant only to have taken Ina and Cecil, but, just as we were setting off, Marietta came in, and Ina asked, before her, whether she might join us, and I had no alternative but to say, 'yes.' This is just a specimen of Ina's want of tact, in anything in which her own will is concerned. If she does not care about a matter she can judge rightly and act wisely; but the moment her will is aroused, it is so strong that it tries to upset every obstacle, and so she does the most awkward things, and brings herself and others into difficulties.

I did not at all wish to have Marietta with me to-day. Fond as I am of her, I dislike the idea that we cannot be satisfied with just our own party; and I do not wish it to be said that the children are never seen without her. And to-day, as events turned out, I had special cause for regretting her being with us, though, for her own sake, poor child! rather than for ours.

We had a delightful walk through the wood and along the beach to Westford,—so fresh and exhilarating! The trees are indeed rather scorched, and the autumnal colouring has not yet beautified them, but the purple shadows on the sea, and the bright islands of light, were exquisite; and

the sparkle of the waves, as they dashed in upon the rocks, made one feel quite young again. The three girls were in joyous spirits, Marietta taking the lead, as is her wont; Ina, forgetting self and the world, urging her on by pleasant little repartees, which had something almost approaching to wit in them; and Cecil, with her downright honesty and tendency to matter-of-factness, bringing down upon herself showers of good-natured raillery. They appealed to me continually to settle their merry differences, and it made me so happy to feel how much I could be to them, for they said several times, how delightful it was to have me with them; how much pleasanter a walk with me was, than a walk with anyone else. Not that they have much experience of any other companionship, but still, it is most comforting to know that, for the present, at least, one is sufficient for them. I sometimes wonder at their being so contented to be away from their grandmother, but then I remember that the contrast is not between Dernham and Arling, but Dernham and school. We had a full afternoon's work before us at Westford, so many autumn purchases to be made, for the weather is already beginning to be chilly. I think I must have spent, at least, half an hour at King's, the linen draper; and at last Cecil grew so tired of looking at shawls, and mantillas, and morning dresses, that she entreated to be allowed to go with Marietta and Ina to Stamford's, the stationer, where she was to choose some photographs to be sent as little presents to her grandmamma. There was no actual objection, as I was to follow them in a few minutes, and they went off. Mr. L'Estrange came into King's almost immediately afterwards. He told me he was going to lay in a store of needles and tape for the school, an idea which vastly amused me; but he assured me that he knew all about it, and never allowed any one to make the purchases but himself. A great mistake—for if he would

put these small businesses into Lady Anson's hands, he would gain her over in great things; but he has a mania for the government by self, which is just the reverse of self-government, and as a result, he quarrels with everyone. However, I kept my opinions to myself, and, by what I flatter myself was a little judicious management, prevented him from laying in a stock of gigantic needles, fit only for his own huge fingers, and we were excellent friends, though all in a stiff way. As I was looking into the street, whilst the shopman was making out my account, I saw a party of people—three ladies and two gentlemen, approaching. So many together would alone have attracted my notice, but their manner and style of dress made me almost exclaim—I think, indeed, I must have said something involuntarily, for Mr. L'Estrange turned round, and asked what it was I was looking at?

'Those people,' I said. 'Did you ever see such an exaggeration of Westford fashion—slang fashion?'

Straw hats, feathers, flowers, ribbons of all the colours of the rainbow, with jackets and gilt buttons, short petticoats and manly boots! They really were figures for a show.

Mr. L'Estrange followed them with his eye, but said not a word.

'The lady in the centre,' I said; 'the one who is walking between the two gentlemen, I mean, has a handsome face; only it is so bold. And she is not exactly common-looking, though decidedly in bad taste.'

'Very bad,' said Mr. L'Estrange, gruffly.

'Do you know who she is?' I asked.

I think he could scarcely have heard me, for, without answering, he took up his packet of needles and tape, deposited them in his pocket, made me a bow, and walked out of the shop. By this time I had done all I wished,

and I went after him. I saw him stalking down the street with those remarkable long strides of his, which, Mrs. Bradshaw says, always remind her of the ostriches in the deserts; but when he came near the strangers he slackened his pace, and as the centre lady and her friends turned into a shop, he went in after them. I did not at first perceive that the shop was Stamford's, but when I did I hurried on, for I had an indescribable dislike to the idea of the three girls being in the same shop with these uncomfortable-looking people. To my extreme disgust I saw, when I entered, Marietta talking to the slang lady, the two gentlemen at a little distance eyeing her through glasses stuck into the corner of the eye; whilst Ina and Cecil were bending their heads over a portfolio of photographs, plainly desiring to shrink into nothing. In the centre of the shop was Mr. L'Estrange, not looking at anything, not doing anything, but standing with his stick pressed against his lips immediately behind Marietta. One glance at her was sufficient to show that the meeting with her friends was unwelcome. So proud, cold, and stern an expression I never before saw on so young a face.

'Now, child, you must just come with me for one moment,' I heard the lady say as I entered; 'You will be back directly, and I can trust the parcel to no hands but yours.'

'I am very sorry; I will send for it to-morrow,' said Marietta.

'Ah! little wilful one;' and the lady seized Marietta's hand; 'You think I don't see through your excuses; but I must have you. Major Benson will testify to the fact that I promised it should be given to no one but to you or your aunt. Now, is not this true, major?'

Major Benson, a red-whiskered, red-bearded, most unpleasant-looking individual, came forward, and said, in a very soft voice, 'Certainly, if I have the pleasure of speaking to *la belle Marietta*.'

The flush on the poor child's cheek was painful, and in my earnest wish to release her from these odious people, I was about to introduce myself, when Mr. L'Estrange, not seeing me, stepped forward, and said :

' Miss Randolph, Mrs. Anstruther will be here in one moment. Lady Chase, Miss Randolph is under Mrs. Anstruther's care.'

Lady Chase dropped Marietta's hand, stared haughtily at the rector, and then, addressing Marietta, said, in a nonchalant tone,

' Is Mrs. Anstruther a new friend, my dear ?'

Marietta just then caught sight of me. The expression of relief in her face was quite touching. She rushed up to me, and at the same moment Mr. L'Estrange thrust himself almost rudely before me, so as entirely to prevent my seeing or speaking to anyone but Marietta; and I heard him say to Lady Chase,

' I shall be willing to take charge of any parcel which may be intended for Miss Randolph. If you will give your address I will call for it.'

The tone of his voice was alarming. I was thankful he was not speaking to me; and I think even Lady Chase was awed, for she beckoned to her two friends, and literally slunk out of the shop, muttering something about 'another time.' Mr. L'Estrange watched her till she was half way down the street, and then he awkwardly, and rather coldly, wished me 'Good-morning,' and I cannot but think followed her, for he certainly went in the same direction.

I question whether Cecil understood what was going on; it all passed so rapidly, and she takes everything so simply. But I am nearly sure that Ina did. At any rate, she saw that Marietta was discomposed and uncomfortable; and her pretty soothing manner made me understand somewhat of the fascination which she ex-

ercises over Marietta's southern temperament. Ina is really very affectionate, and, when she can forget self and the world, she is charming.

We finished our business, and I hastened to get out of the town as soon as possible, for I had no inclination to meet Lady Chase again. Marietta and Ina went together, and Cecil walked with me, chattering the whole way about an apparatus for drying flowers, which she has just bought. No allusion was made to Lady Chase, except by Cecil's observation, that 'she should not like to have such a disagreeable-looking woman for a friend.' We took the upper road, which is shorter than the other, and this led us through the village. Marietta told me she wished to inquire for a little sister of the Woodleigh housemaid's, who was ill, and whilst she went into the cottage where the child was, we walked up and down in front, and just at that moment the rector joined us.

He said nothing of what had passed, but very abruptly asked me if I could take the harmonium on Sunday, as the man who generally plays it is going away. He seemed to look upon it as a matter of course that I should do it if I could, and I think he was surprised when I said,

'I must think about it; I cannot give an answer at once.'

'If you cannot, perhaps one of your daughters can?' he observed, persistingly; a proposition which elicited a loud 'Oh!' from Cecil. 'In fact,' he continued, 'I want to improve the church music altogether. This man plays very badly, and when the new organ is put up we must have someone else. But I don't intend to have a choir; I don't like choirs. I wish the singing to be congregational. The school children would sing well, but they require training, and I look to the ladies of my parish who understand music to undertake the training.'

He made me feel so perverse, I could have said, like a naughty child, 'It is very well to look for it, but will it

be done?' I hope, though, that I behaved pretty well, for I merely remarked that I was afraid he might find some difficulty.

'No doubt; but what can be done without difficulty? If you are unwilling to help me on Sunday, Mrs. Anstruther, I will ask Miss Randolph.'

'I beg you not to say unwilling,' was my reply, 'but unable. I have never tried to play the harmonium above twice in my life, and then I made a great mess of it. I don't think I could undertake it.'

'Oh, indeed! I asked because Miss Randolph wished it. She plays beautifully.'

'And she has no objection to play?' I said.

'Oh, yes, she objects; but she will do it.'

He left me, and went into the cottage. Several minutes elapsed before he came out with Marietta. The harmonium had become quite secondary in that short time, for the child was extremely ill, and Marietta's whole heart was engrossed in sending for the doctor, and finding some woman who would attend to her, as she had no mother, and lived alone with her father. The rector was very gentle, almost tender, in his way of speaking about the child. He would go himself, he said, and see that everything was done that could be done. He thought he could find a woman to come at once; he would send a messenger to Westford for the doctor.

'And in the meantime,' I said, 'I will stay with the child, if necessary.'

'I do not think it necessary. I am much obliged, but I shall bring the woman here immediately. I must say good afternoon, Mrs. Anstruther. Good-bye, Miss Randolph;' and making his usual stiff bow, the rector strode down a lane opposite to me at the rate of, at least, four miles an hour.

'It would be much better if I were to stay,' I said to Marietta. 'You three could walk home perfectly well.'

‘He will not like it,’ replied Marietta. ‘He never does like any person to do anything; at least, it must be in his way. And he will come back directly. But I shall walk down again to-night, or send Jane, our house-maid. Perhaps my aunt will spare her to go home to her sister.’

‘Yes, that would be best of all; and no doubt your aunt will spare her.’

‘Perhaps. She may not be able;—it depends. Some people from London may be coming; they have been expected for some time.’

‘I am afraid you must hurry home,’ I said, ‘or the friends will be come before you are ready to receive them; it is growing so late.’

‘People, not friends,’ said Marietta, emphatically; but she quickened her steps.

I kept by her, and said: ‘Are you really prepared to play the harmonium on Sunday, my dear?’

She stopped suddenly.

‘Oh! no, Mrs. Anstruther, I can’t. It will be so very frightening. And you will do it, you are so kind?’

‘I would if I could, my love, but really I have quite forgotten my music, and the harmonium is an especially difficult instrument; and besides, this is Friday, and there is no time to practise. Indeed, I am nearly sure that even if I were to practise I should never manage it.’

‘But to play—to sit up—to face them all—and to be quite alone! Oh! I cannot. I would not make Mr. L’Estrange angry for all the world—but—’

‘He can’t be angry, my dear,’ I said. ‘He ought to have thought of the matter before, and not have driven us up into a corner in this way.’

‘He determines what is to be done always,’ said Marietta, ‘and then he does it.’

‘Or he makes other people do it,’ I said, laughing.

‘But, Marietta, with all respect for the rector, we must

teach him a little differently. He cannot order everything at a minute's notice in this way.'

'He does order it,' said Marietta, sighing.

'But you must say, no,' exclaimed Cecil.

'I have said it,' she replied. 'He told me three days ago that perhaps it was to be, and I said I should be too frightened.'

'Of course you will be frightened,' said Ina. 'Why, you will have to sit out almost in the middle of the church, and face everyone, and have them all staring at you and criticising; there won't be a creature near you, and the children will be certain to sing badly. I would not be in your place for worlds.'

'I should forget the people,' observed Cecil. 'I should think of the music.'

'I would try,' said poor Marietta; 'but I would not say that I could do it, Cecil; and perhaps you would find it hard.'

'Yes, perhaps I should; there is a difference certainly between talking of a thing and doing it,' said Cecil.

'Can't you help? Won't you take it? Dear, dear Mrs. Anstruther, what shall I do?'

'Leave it, and let the rector manage for himself,' I was almost tempted to reply, for really I felt quite provoked with him for thrusting the office, so entirely without consideration, upon a young girl like Marietta.

But Ina turned round to me and said,

'Mamma, if you and I, and a few of the school children who sing best, could sit on the bench near the harmonium, it would not be so bad for Marietta.'

'Oh! indeed, if you would do that; if you would only be so kind! If I might but have some one near me, I should be so happy. And Mr. L'Estrange is so very good to me, I could not vex him.'

'I will think about it,' was all I could say. A cold reply, but —

CHAPTER XVIII.

October 21.—The last word which I wrote in my Journal was ominous. The ‘but’ was a word of misgiving, and that well founded. And yet, what could I have done differently? Somehow or other, and for some reason or other, the rector is nothing more or less than a tyrant over Marietta; very good to her and helpful—the greatest possible help in certain ways—but still a tyrant. She dares not say him nay, under any circumstances. And the poor child would have been really very uncomfortable if left to take the church music by herself; and what is more, she would have done herself harm in the opinion of the gossiping world by it. She is just so free and peculiar in manner, from her foreign style, that she manages, most unconsciously, to attract more observation than is desirable. And, then, people judge her by her aunt, and her aunt’s society, and so things which would be unnoticed or thought quite pardonable in others, are not considered to be so in her. Very hard all this is; but one cannot fight against it: and if Marietta were to sit alone, nearly in the centre of the church, facing the congregation, and managing the singing, it would be said directly, ‘Oh! yes, Miss Randolph does not object to being conspicuous; it is her style.’ In fact I have heard this kind of remark made with reference to some other slight peculiarities. The only person who could shield her from this kind of unpleasant criticism is myself. Except Mrs. Randolph, I am literally the only middle-aged lady in the village who is not at this moment just

so much out of sorts with the rector as to decline working with him or for him. Ina's suggestion, made as we were walking home from Westford, was the only satisfactory one, and it was carried out with the rector's consent. We practised on the Saturday, and managed to get through the service very fairly on the Sunday. Indeed, Mrs. Bradshaw declares that the improvement for the better in the singing was quite marvellous, and her opinion seems to have been shared by many. The result might have been anticipated. The rector has set his heart upon installing us all as a kind of nucleus for a choir, though he will not have it called such; and the church singing is given into Marietta's hands, with myself for her guide, and Ina and Cecil as assistants.

I could have declined, but if I had done so I must have left Marietta to herself; and the more I see and know of her position at Woodleigh, the more I feel that this would be absolute cruelty.

But my own children? I ask myself continually; am I doing them any harm by all this? I very much dislike bringing them at all into notice; especially I dislike it for Ina. But if we have the school children with us, we must have someone to lead them; and I am there merely as *chaperone*, for I have no voice, whereas Ina sings charmingly. I made Cecil join us just because I wished to keep her with me; and since then one of the Miss Masons sits on what is called the singing bench; but she would be of no use without Ina.

It seems a small matter, but it has cost me a good deal of anxious thought, for of course this sort of thing must have its effect upon character. We are moulded imperceptibly by these trifles, and so they become important. Again I fall back upon the thought that I must accept the circumstances which seem to point out a duty, and leave the results to God. I find that this interest in the

church music has led to greater interest in parish matters and the poor, which is one good thing. Ina goes with me to the school now. She wished Marietta to go too, but she was not able to manage that and the music too; and I own I was not sorry for it. It would have thrown Ina and Marietta still more together, and every thing and every person connected with Woodleigh is made the subject of remark in this gossiping neighbourhood. Even as it is, the intimacy with Marietta has, I suspect, tended to foster the prejudice which began with the school feud. Lady Anson and Mrs. Harcourt have implied to Mrs. Bradshaw that the rector chooses such very singular assistants in his parish work, that they feel it better to keep aloof; and thus, although he has actually rescinded some of his obnoxious requirements, and gives us leave to teach the children as we like in the afternoon, so long as the little books are used in the morning, there is still the same antagonistic spirit in the village. The Ansons and Harcourts are supposed to be on one side; Woodleigh, the Cottage, and the Rectory on the other. Mrs. Bradshaw vibrates between the two. She does not like submission, but she sees that the anti-rectorial spirit is weak and prejudiced. She flatters me by telling me that she likes the rector better since he has become my friend, and so I hope I may have done some good by supporting him. For myself, I care for nothing that is said of me, except when I am supposed to be associated with Woodleigh. Just now it is particularly odious. Such a strange set of people Mrs. Randolph has with her. Dress, manners, conversation—all, so far as one can judge, of a slang character. And so noisy! They ride through the village in parties of three or four, laughing and talking, and now and then actually calling to each other, till the cottagers come out of their houses to see what is the matter! The strange thing is, that Mrs.

Randolph herself does not join them. I have only once seen her out of her own garden during the last ten days, and then she struck me as looking simply miserable ; worn and yet restless, so that it was quite painful to watch the expression of her face. Mrs. Bradshaw, when we met yesterday, lifted up her hands and said,

‘ My dear, I must quote the only Latin proverb I know—“*Quem Deus vult perdere prius dementat.*” She is demented, that is the only word to use.’

‘ Her friends seem more demented than herself,’ I said.

‘ I should be glad to think so. You know what the “Quarterly Review” once said, when criticising the memoirs of Caroline, Princess of Wales, written by one of her ladies. I forget the exact title of the book. “The Princess,” the Reviewer said, “was certainly out of her mind ; he only wished he could bring forward the same melancholy excuse for the lady in waiting.” That is precisely my wish with regard to these people at Woodleigh. If they were insane you might shut them up in a lunatic asylum, and there would be an end of them ; as it is, they go about spreading poison, and sowing evil, and no one can interfere, because they are greater knaves than fools.’

‘ It is Mr. Randolph’s fault,’ I said. ‘ Why does he not come down at once, and put a stop to it ? ’

‘ He won’t, that is all I can say. Just now the particular reason he alleges is that he cannot get his wife to promise that she will give up all intercourse and intimacy with that woman Lady Chase, who is really nothing more or less than good for nothing, though Mrs. Randolph will not believe it. Lady Chase has never yet been at Woodleigh, but they are seen together in the Westford streets, and on the pier, frequently.’

‘ And Mr. Randolph hears of it, and very naturally is disgusted with it ? ’ I said.

‘ Oh, yes ! very naturally. But if he had only treated

his wife wisely, he might have prevented it. When they first married his will was law ; but he is a sour-tempered man, and crotchety, and he drew the reins too tight, and she had never been accustomed to restraint, and rebelled, and so things went from bad to worse, till they reached the pitch they are at now.'

'But what can Mrs. Randolph find in Lady Chase to attract her?' I asked. 'Such a bold-looking, utterly unrefined person, and with such a very decidedly objectionable tone, both in herself and her friends.' And I related the little scene which had taken place in Westford.

'The rector interfered, did he?' said Mrs. Bradshaw ; 'that is just like him. And he looks upon Marietta as under his special charge. He was intimate with her father. As to Mrs. Randolph's liking for Lady Chase, one can only say what one does of all her friends. Why are they friends? There is, I think, some generosity, and a great deal of wilfulness in Mrs. Randolph's conduct ; with a mixture of that strange instinct which often makes us women torment most those whom, at the bottom of our hearts, we love best. Mrs. Randolph chooses to say that Lady Chase is more sinned against than sinning, and the more her husband asserts the contrary, the more she persists in upholding this woman.'

'That poor, poor child, Marietta !' I exclaimed. 'What an infinite shame it is to leave her here.'

'Poor child, indeed ! and yet it is the greatest tribute to her worth which any man could pay. Her aunt's keeper—that is what she is—nothing more or less. And the way she discharges her duty—the patience, dignity, self-control, the good sense, the unselfishness ;—my dear, if I were but a man, and five-and-twenty instead of five-and-fifty, I should lose my heart to her upon the spot.'

'I know it. I feel it all,' I said. 'If I did not, Marietta would never have been admitted to my house.'

Woodleigh, apart from her, is a kind of horrid nightmare to me. But what is going to be done about this intimacy with Lady Chase ?'

'Who knows? But if she should be ever admitted within the gates of Woodleigh, Mr. Randolph will, I feel convinced, recall Marietta, take her with him to the Continent, and never see his wife again.'

'A most severe punishment,' I said.

'Yes, and he is severe; but he has, I own, been greatly aggravated.'

'And Lady Chase, I suppose, is making every effort to thrust herself into Woodleigh?'

'Of course. She is what is called out of society. Mrs. Randolph as yet is in it; and Lady Chase is one of those fiercely-determined women who, when they once have an object in view, will move heaven and earth to accomplish it. Her wish to get Marietta to her house the other day was simply the desire to publish to the world that in spite of all it says of her she has respectable acquaintances.'

'How long is Lady Chase likely to stay at Westford?' I inquired.

'I don't know. How should I? It is out of the question for me to go to Woodleigh when all these people are there; and so I hear nothing from Mrs. Randolph, and can only occasionally have a glimpse of Marietta, who after all is not so very fond of me, and therefore does not tell me everything she might.'

'She must know you are her friend,' I said.'

'Yes, to a certain extent; but she cannot quite make me out. I am too off-hand, and she has learnt to distrust off-hand people; and besides she knows that I do not think her uncle perfect. No, it is impossible she should quite like me, and I always own it, and make myself see the reason for it, and then I am not unjust to her. There are so many distrustfulnesses in this world which

are the result, not of any doubt as to character or intention, but of the awkward positions in which people are placed with regard to each other.'

'I am afraid,' I said, laughing, 'that you, as Mrs. Randolph's ally, are not as respectable as Marietta, who is Mr. Randolph's.'

'That is just it. But it would not do for our positions to be reversed. If Marietta were her aunt's supporter, she would be simply ruined in the eyes of the world, and most probably in reality. As for me, I have been more than fifty years acquiring a reputation for prudence and propriety, and now having, as I flatter myself, gained it, I think I am at liberty to make use of it for the sake of those who are not quite so fortunate. My son and his wife want me to spend the winter with them in Italy; but as long as that woman is at Westford, and Mrs. Randolph hovering on the brink of destruction (for if she should become much more intimate with Lady Chase it can scarcely fail to be destruction), so long I remain at Dernham, to watch how affairs are going on.'

Mrs. Bradshaw turned to go. I shook hands with her warmly.

'You think me a self-denying martyr,' she said; 'I am not that. Woodleigh is painfully interesting and rather exciting to me. I doubt if I should care as much for the Venus de' Medici as for Julia Randolph. And I don't like the thoughts of a long journey, and I look upon the Mediterranean as my deadly enemy. There are a great many things to keep me at home, besides Christian charity. No, if you want to test my powers of martyrdom, ask me to catechise the Sunday-school children out of one of the rector's little reference books. I am not come to that yet. Good-bye.'

CHAPTER XIX.

October 27.—I am beginning to repent. This affair of church music involves much more than I had calculated upon. The rector, in his cool way said, when Marietta took the harmonium, ‘Mrs. Anstruther, it will be necessary to practise regularly; we shall meet at the church on Thursday at three o’clock; it is the only day I can spare.’ And I—being supposed to have no engagements, because I have not the care of the parish—could but acquiesce, thinking it would only be for a few weeks, and that, as the rector was to be there himself, I might go or not as I liked. But now it is settled, that instead of being the temporary, Marietta is to be the permanent harmoniumist; and the rector, instead of presiding at the practising, has given it over into her hands, and only now and then comes to it; and all this is done without any consultation as to the desirability of such an arrangement. The consequence is, that I am tied down to preside at the practisings, simply because some one must, and no one else will. I don’t complain; it is quite necessary and right that one should exert oneself, and make sacrifices in such matters; but to have an office thrown upon one in this way is decidedly trying. It takes away all the grace and pleasure of it. I suppose the rector would say, ‘Where is the difficulty? why should you trouble yourself about it, as you don’t sing?’ He is so curiously simple-minded, and in some respects unknowing as to worldly matters, that he would not see the necessity for my being present. Yet it is a necessity,

and one which, for the most part, he himself has created. In his mania for improving the church music, he has gone about the parish, beating up for recruits; and now, besides Miss Mason, we have a sister, and a brother, and a boy cousin, and, to my great surprise, last Thursday, Mr. Anson! I should sooner have expected the skies to fall than that anyone from the Manor should have joined the Dernham choir. But Mr. Anson came and offered himself in a sort of chance way, strolling into the church whilst we were singing, joining with us, and then saying he should be glad if he could be of any assistance. I hesitated, but Marietta, in her bright way, answered, 'Oh! yes, you will be the greatest possible help; a tenor voice is just what we want.' I insisted upon referring the question to the rector, and he accepted the offer; not, I thought, very graciously—not, as Marietta had said, as if 'it was just the thing wanted;' but rather as if he could not help it. I dare say he felt that, in the present state of affairs, it would not do to reject any offers of friendliness coming from the Manor. So last Sunday the original singing bench was full, and there was another behind it, full likewise. Not a strictly ecclesiastical arrangement, but serviceable for the time being. When we have a new organ things will be different. I could not but sit there both in the morning and the afternoon. Mr. Anson and Ina led the singing. In my secret heart I greatly wished it had been otherwise; but the very fact of being uncomfortable made me see that it would not do to give up my place to anyone else.

Agnes was grieved, and my little Hugh quite cross. It had been their Sunday treat to go to church with mamma, and now they were obliged to be content with nurse. Cecil, however, showed herself so unselfish and helpful on this occasion, that it a good deal repaid me for my small vexations in other ways. She saw I did not

like the little ones to be exiled entirely, and so she begged to be allowed to give up her place near the harmonium, where her office had been to turn over the leaves and arrange the books for Marietta, which she very much likes ; and to take the two little ones into a seat, generally vacant, close by me, and attend to them herself, in order that they might not in any way trouble me. I did not choose to do this without consulting the rector, who likes to know where everyone is placed, and so, last Sunday, Cecil, in order to please Agnes, sat as usual in the centre aisle, in our own seat. Next Sunday I hope they may all be nearer. It is in these small things that Cecil shows her disposition, which is to me very attractive. Yet when I ask myself in what its peculiar charm consists, I do not find it very easy to answer. She is in most respects as young for her age as Ina is old for hers, and many persons would say that her character is quite unformed. I can scarcely call her demonstrative as to affection ; she seems too light-hearted to be roused to very fervent expressions of feeling. It is rather a sense of truth and loyalty which I have in thinking of her. There, again, I feel a little puzzled, for when she first came here she certainly had acquired some of Ina's rather oblique views of truth—truth in act, I mean. I could not entirely trust her. But latterly that phase of fault seems to have vanished. Yet I have never talked to her much about it, I have only acted truly towards her, and shown her that I valued trustworthiness above everything. It is the quiet steady sunniness (is there such a word ?) of her temperament, which is so very pleasant to me. I am rather an anxious person, I know—too anxious—and so the home skies are often, to my mind, clouded. But Cecil is always satisfied, always hopeful, nothing comes amiss to her. Dry weather or wet, lessons or play, society or books, she can be happy under all circumstances. She never makes a martyr of herself. Self-

denials seem no self-denials to her at the time, though I often find out afterwards from nurse that they really are such. 'Miss Cecil is a good deal put upon by Miss Ina, ma'am,' was the remark she made to me the other day, and ever since I have been trying to find out how to stop it. But Ina is exacting in such a very unobtrusive way, that I scarcely see how to interfere. Cecil's character is particularly desirable as regards Agnes, who certainly is not sunny, and I do not believe anything will ever make her so. What with an over-scrupulous conscience, a habit of tormenting herself by questions which cannot be answered, a most sensitive nervous temperament, and a power of love and self-devotion which seems rather to belong to a woman than a child, her poor little mind has no rest. Besides being unselfish in all matters, Cecil tries especially to make herself useful to me with the little ones. She has asked me to let her teach Essie to read and spell, and I am only too glad to say 'yes,' for, of all wearying tasks, that of making a child read words of one syllable is the worst. The only thing I insist upon is, that the lesson should be really a lesson, not play; that Essie shall have her hands and face washed, and be brought down stairs with a clean pinafore on, and be made to stand still, so far as that is possible, whilst the lesson lasts. It is very pretty to watch the young governess and the tiny pupil. Cecil is so gentle and wise with the little one, and Essie looks up at her with her merry blue eyes, longing for a game of play, and every now and then trying how far she may venture on one; and then Cecil puts on her grave expression and holds up her finger, and the baby face becomes so absurdly demure, it is impossible to help laughing. But I behave very well, let Cecil manage her own way—for if one delegates authority it is ruinous to interfere with its exercise—and only reward myself at the end by a shower of kisses.

October 31.—We have been practising for All Saints' Day. It is one of the rector's special festivals. He certainly is very peculiar; with a much greater idea of submission to his own will than to church authority. He is in fact a pope. What he likes he does, and what he does not like he leaves undone. Certain days he observes, and the rest he takes no notice of. Mrs. Bradshaw finds grievous fault, and I can't say that I approve of it; but really, after living amongst heathens, as I did latterly at the Cape, one is only too thankful for even the crumbs of Christianity—which does not, however, mean that we have nothing more than crumbs here. The Ansons, I believe, object to all festivals, except Christmas and Easter, so they quarrel with All Saints' Day; but however this may be, Mr. Anson was at the practising, and I am afraid I saw something like a little consciousness of his presence on Marietta's part; very slight, only a nervousness and shyness that might have arisen from other causes, but which made me a little suspicious. I should be troubled if I thought there was a likelihood of any feeling between them, because I feel so sure that Lady Anson and Sir John would object to it. And then the Dernham world are beginning to look upon me as the responsible person for all this musical business; and, if anything uncomfortable should spring from it, I shall be the person blamed. But so it must be. It is but cowardice to shrink from responsibility, or the publicity which comes before one as a duty, merely because one dreads to be found fault with.

What I do shrink from very much though, without in the slightest degree knowing how to check it, is the kind of assumption of peculiar interest in Ina and Cecil which I find Mrs. Randolph adopting on the strength of their grandmamma's introduction. She seems quite to have forgotten our stormy interview, and though I am cold it makes no impression on her. To-day, as we were going

to the church, Mrs. Randolph met us, on her way, as she said, to the cottage, with a small parcel for Ina—a photograph of Katharine Penrhyn, taken from a miniature which she had by her. She only wished I would allow the two girls to come to Woodleigh and look at the original. I evaded a direct reply, but what I said was of little consequence, because Ina instantly took up the idea, and was so grateful and pleased, and so charmed with the photograph, which really is very lovely, that I had scarcely the opportunity of putting in a word. All this went on as we were walking to the church, and when we got there, Mrs. Randolph went in on the plea of wishing to hear how Marietta managed the practising; and when she was once there she joined in the singing, and—such a magnificent voice she has!—Marietta's is nothing to it, and Ina's merely a little warble. I could not help fancying, poor thing! that there was something soothing to her in the place, and the society, and the occupation—so different from the noise and false mirth of her present friends, who, as I heard the other day (I forget exactly from whom), spend their evenings at cards, and play very high. The worn, restless face became quieted, and the eyes were uplifted with a feeling which I am sure was really devotional; and when she saw that we were pleased—for it was impossible not to be so when the rich tones went ringing through the church—she became quite excited, and said she should like to come again whenever she could, and then, if she knew what we were going to sing, and had practised beforehand, it would be more easy to keep the singing right in her own part of the church. Marietta caught at the idea, as a drowning man catches at a rope;—anything, as I could see, to bring her aunt into safe society; and Ina, with whom music is a perfect passion, seconded the wish with an eagerness to which poor Mrs. Randolph responded quite touchingly.

‘Ah!’ she exclaimed, ‘that is how aunt Katharine would have looked and spoken. I have sung so much with her in my happy days,’ and she took Ina’s hand, and in her curious un-English way pressed it to her lips.

Ina was pleased. Marietta looked grave. I?—I don’t know how I looked, but I am quite sure how I felt—and yet, if anyone could only give this poor thing quiet home interests, and win her affections, she might still be saved from a life which seems gradually leading her deeper and deeper into wretchedness. Mr. Anson was one of my great troubles whilst this little scene was going on. I watched him when he first saw Mrs. Randolph, and am sure he was startled, and disliked her being mixed up with us; but the moment Marietta expressed pleasure at the thought of her aunt’s being with us, he came forward and spoke quite as earnestly as Ina, so that those three made themselves remarked by the other singers—Miss Mason, I mean, and her brother—by their eagerness in the matter. Now the Masons, though not living quite in one’s own circle, are just as alive to all which goes on in it, and just as likely to make remarks and discuss proprieties as we are; and I have no doubt that they hear much more of the Woodleigh household than I do; and it is not very pleasant to have Ina’s name associated with this extreme desire to bring Mrs. Randolph into our church practising, whilst I am standing by and can say nothing. And then,—what was still more disagreeable,—the moment Mrs. Randolph appeared, the tone of the whole thing seemed changed. It was not so much what she said and did, as how she said and did it. There was something of worldly criticism, if I may so call it, in her remarks. They were worthy of attention, but they would have applied better to opera singing than to church music; in fact, at last, I began to feel as if we really were practising for some kind of public *fête*. Marietta, I

am certain, felt this as much as I did. We both of us tried to check the remarks upon taste, *crescendo*, and *diminuendo*, and the examples given by Mrs. Randolph, as to how things ought to be done; and anyone listening to us would have supposed that we cared for nothing but singing the hymns straight through and in good tune; but everything depends upon the spirit in which this kind of criticism is carried on. Expression is one thing, effect another; and Mrs. Randolph's instructions all tended towards producing effect.

I was heartily glad when the practising was over, but not at all glad when Mrs. Randolph walked with us to the Woodleigh gate, and then begged that we would all go in and look at the miniature. I said at once that 'we had not time,' which was quite true, and I was thankful for it. I certainly will not be drawn into any more intimate acquaintance, especially whilst the house is filled with unsatisfactory visitors. Ina looked extremely disappointed, and Mrs. Randolph was, as she usually is, very pertinacious. She left us, after saying to Ina, without any reference to me,—

'Then you will come another day, my dear. I should like to try how your voice will go with mine in a duet. In a trio with myself and Marietta it would be delicious—just what we want.'

'A trio would be delightful!' exclaimed Ina, her face brightening; 'wouldn't it, Marietta?'

'I am not accustomed to sing trios,' was Marietta's short reply.

It sounded very ungracious, and I think it must have given Mrs. Randolph offence; but they both turned in at the gate, and I saw no more of them.

November 8.—Two things to be noted to-day, because they tell upon one another. Mr. L'Estrange (whom I saw at the cottage of Lizzie Brown, the Woodleigh house-

maid's sister,) mentioned that the bishop is ready to hold a Confirmation here in February; and Mrs. Penryhn writes inviting us all to Arling for Christmas. To accept the invitation just as it is given—I mean according to the time—involves remaining there through January, and running the risk of the girls' minds being upset by the kind of society they are sure to meet; and this, just when I desire above all things to keep them steady and quiet. To refuse it, involves the certainty of giving deadly offence to Mrs. Penryhn, the invitation being a most decided move in the direction of cordiality; and—what I feel to be an important point,—keeping Ina in Mrs. Randolph's neighbourhood, when it is evident to me that it would be better she should be away from it. Since the practising at the church last week, there has been a decided advance in Ina's admiration. She can talk of nothing but Mrs. Randolph's magnificent voice, and her graceful manners, and she is constantly asking me when we are to go in and see the miniature. I suspect, too, that some correspondence with her grandmamma has been carried on, connected with Mrs. Randolph; for the other day there came a letter, of which she read only a portion to me, whilst I saw Marietta with it in her hand, when she happened to come in to return a book; and I conclude she had had permission to read it. What I might not hear and Marietta might, could only have concerned Mrs. Randolph.

Thinking of all these things, I am sorely puzzled how to act. My impression is, that it will be better to decide upon going to Arling; I owe a duty to Mrs. Penryhn, there is no doubt of that. She has been the children's guardian from their infancy; her home has been theirs. My husband liked and esteemed her; and though I distrust her, my feelings may be prejudice. If I annoy her by refusing the invitation, she will, I feel con-

vinced, use all the influence she has with the children, and especially with Ina, against me, and this will be worse than anything. I shall try to make some engagement which may bind me to return home the second week in January ; that will give us time to settle down before the Confirmation; and, if we only go away from home just before Christmas-day, we shall scarcely have three weeks at Arling, and in that time, I hope, no great mischief can be done. As for Mrs. Randolph, I must simply watch, and do the best I can from day to day, as circumstances arise. If the difficulty were with Cecil, I could go at once and say all I have to say without reserve; she would listen to me humbly, and accept my opinion without question; but Ina has a decided wilfulness, which makes her determined to maintain her own views simply for the sake of maintaining them. She is certainly a most singular mixture of gentleness and determination. 'That sweet amiable girl,' as I so often hear her called, and as I quite agree she is, so long as you let her have her own way; and, even when she cannot have it, she is still sweet, only she won't yield. She asserts that Mrs. Randolph is merely un-English, and that she is not to be judged by the same standard which applies to other people; and her pertinacity upon this point would be amusing if it did not involve important consequences. I can scarcely say I distrust Ina, and yet I never feel sure that she will not make some excuse for doing what I desire should not be done. Yesterday afternoon, when I was coming back from the village with Cecil, who had been with me to see Stephen's old father, we found Ina, with Hugh and Essie, talking to Mrs. Randolph just inside the Lodge gates. Agnes was with nurse behind. Ina joined me the moment she saw me, and Mrs. Randolph turned away. Ina said, directly:

'I only went in, mamma, to leave a message for

Marietta with Mrs. Dyer (she is the Lodge-keeper), and just then Mrs. Randolph came down the road.'

'My dear,' I said, 'you have been forbidden, under any pretence, to go within the Woodleigh gates without me.'

'Oh yes, mamma; but I only stopped for one moment, as we were going by; and nurse said she would wait for me.'

'My dear,' I again repeated, 'I wish you, on no pretence, to go within the Lodge gates, without my express permission. Do you understand that now?'

'Oh yes, certainly; but when you said Woodleigh gates, I thought you meant we were not to go up to the house.'

'I meant what I said,' I repeated. 'And, Ina, you know perfectly well why I said it. I do not desire you to be intimate with Mrs. Randolph.'

'I was telling her how grandmamma was; she is so anxious to hear,' replied Ina, with the air of a martyr.

'My dear, you may make as many excuses as you choose,' I said, 'but the fact remains the same. You did what I, for very good reasons, wished you not to do.'

Ina was perfectly sweet-tempered, perfectly submissive in manner; but I felt that I had not gained a step with her. Not because she could not or would not see, but because she was absolutely determined to go her own way.

I thought some time ago that I had touched her, given her a higher standard of action, but this kind of evasion and disobedience disappoints and discourages me. I felt it the more because, just after we had passed the Woodleigh Lodge, two men—I can scarcely call them gentlemen—went in at the gate, and I recognised one as being the same whom we saw with Lady Chase, in Westford. Of course, if Ina had been standing there, talking to Mrs.

Randolph, she would have run the chance of an introduction. I pointed this out to Ina, and her reply was:

‘Oh, mamma, but he is a horror! Mrs. Randolph would never have thought of introducing him to me.’

It would have been no use to repeat my assertion after this, for if a girl of Ina’s age chooses to trust to her own convictions, one cannot shake her self-confidence, for she has not sufficient reason and experience to enable her to recognise the value of the arguments and facts one may bring forward to convince her.

CHAPTER XX.

November 14.—Ina and I called on the Harcourts to-day—rather a long walk; their place, Derrick Park, is two miles from us, reckoning only to the Lodge, and three from Westford; and it must be at least half-a-mile through the park to the house, so that we had walked five miles by the time we returned home. Cecil is not quite equal to going such a distance, and Mrs. Bradshaw, who has taken a great fancy to her, asked me to let Agnes and her go for a drive. It has been a most lovely day, in its stillness, making one think of the November description in the ‘Christian Year,’ the calm leaves floating each to his rest beneath their parent shade. But it was not ‘chill and dun,’—at least, not till the sun went down; and the light through the woods might have belonged to June, if it had not been for the autumnal colouring, the rich yellow, and red, and russet brown, upon which it gleamed. The shadows, too, were much more purple than any summer shadows. Autumn, strange to say, makes me feel younger than summer. There is no discordance or jar; nothing to make me wish that ‘I could feel as I have felt, or be what I have been.’ I am more contented; I have no striving after the unattainable. A walk in a wood on a fine autumn day, with the dry leaves crunching under one’s foot, and the thinned branches giving one peeps of distance hidden in summer, is to me quite exhilarating. In this neighbourhood, too, there is such a great charm in the glimpses of the sea, which one has continually. A quiet and, therefore, a treacherous sea, it was to-day—

misty and gleamy ; but I forgot the possibility and probability of storms, and looked upon it, not as the great gulf into which life, and hope, and joy, are so often cast, but as the broad smooth highway of nations. Ina and I sat down to rest in a sheltered spot, looking upon it, and talking of the lands to which it would lead, and forming plans for foreign travel ; not very likely to be carried out, but very pleasant to indulge in. Ina is very sympathising and loving when one talks to her alone, and about oneself ; I believe that is the way really to touch her. I had such a sense of her *comprehendingness* to-day, that I ventured to go far back to the years that are in general as dreamy as the land mingling with the clouds on the horizon of the sea ; and by a half painful, half enjoyable effort of memory and imagination, I made them all real again. I told her of my home, my life, my studies, my pleasures, my hopes and disappointments ; placing them before her as I see them now, with all the lights and shades which the poetry of time casts over them. And as I talked to her, I could not help feeling that it is the poetical rather than the matter-of-fact view of life which contains its reality, since it is that which enables one mind to comprehend another. The events of my early days, taken only in their outward form, were essentially unexciting and uninteresting ; but looking at them as the instruments by which my mind and character were formed, trained, and disciplined, they had and have a deep meaning ; and it was this which touched Ina's imagination when I spoke of them, and led her to listen to them with interest, and with an occasional self-application, which made me feel that we were beginning to understand each other.

The road to Derrick took us by the sea at first, and then it turned inland, and we entered the park through the new plantations. This is by far the best approach to the house. The regular long drive through the park is uninteresting,

and the back of the house is seen first, and looks straggling and un-architectural. The front is really imposing, with a very handsome Corinthian portico, and a magnificent flight of steps, and the view over the park and woods to the sea is splendid. Ina and I made the same remark upon the place,—that it was just fitted for the Harcourts, but that we should not care to live there ourselves. I don't think in this case 'the grapes are sour,' for I dislike large places, and parks in themselves, and still more for the duties to society which they entail.

I saw Mr. Harcourt to-day for the first time. He has been on the Continent, trying, I believe, some German baths, which he hopes will cure him of neuralgia. He is a great man, for he is one of our county members, brought in, as a matter of course, without opposition. He is a rather distinguished orator also; and it is said that he will before long be in the Ministry. At any rate, I believe he is bidding high for political promotion. In former days he and Sir John would have been deadly enemies, for the Ansons of old times were Tories, and the Harcourts Whigs; now, by the aid of liberal conservatism and conservative liberalism, they manage to be very good friends, differing only enough to give interest to life. Sir John's conservatism, I believe, is chiefly shown in his attachment to Brady and Tate, and his pew in church; and Mr. Harcourt's liberalism evinces itself mainly in plans for the improvement of the manufacturing districts, which, as they lie far away, Sir John does not trouble himself about. As regards the agricultural population, I fancy they are very much alike, good landlords, and liberal to the poor, and—what is better—really desirous to improve the morality of the neighbourhood by building good cottages, in which the decencies of life may be observed. I like Mr. Harcourt much better than his wife, though she was very civil to-day, and offered us luncheon;

but I could find no interest in anything she said ; whereas he entered at once upon sensible subjects, and gave me a good deal of pleasant information in a simple, straightforward, gentlemanly way. They say that the family are tremendously proud. Mrs. Harcourt bears it in her face ; he does not. He is a tall, plain, rather bluff-looking man, giving one the idea at first sight of little but a sportsman. It is not till one has talked to him that one sees how much there is underneath. I thought when he came into the room, that he looked quite out of place in the gilded drawing-room, with the beautiful ornamental furniture, and *bijouterie*, and pictures.

The visit would have been unnoticeable but for some remarks made upon the singing in church, and one or two other matters which have led me to various cogitations.

Mr. Harcourt began, saying how much the music was improved, and asking Ina if it was not chiefly owing to her.

I was pleased at the simple answer : ‘ Oh ! no ; I only lead the school children. Marietta Randolph teaches them.’

‘ Poor Miss Randolph ! It is very good of you, Mrs. Anstruther, to take so much notice of her, and sit by her,’ said Mrs. Harcourt.

‘ Really,’ I replied, ‘ I cannot call it taking notice. Mr. L’Estrange wishes the young people who can sing to form a kind of choir, and I sit with them merely because I think it is awkward for them to be alone.’

‘ Oh yes, but it is notice ; and I have no doubt she feels that it is so, though I don’t think she dislikes publicity.’

‘ Indeed,’ I said, ‘ Miss Randolph was very unwilling to accept her present office. She only did so because Mr. L’Estrange said so much about it. She entreated me to undertake it, and I would have done it if I possibly could.’

‘You are very kind, I know, and I am sure the poor girl ought to be very much indebted to you. A young creature so peculiarly circumstanced must, I suppose, sometimes place herself in awkward positions from mere ignorance.’

‘I don’t in the least understand,’ I said. ‘I should scarcely have supposed that playing the harmonium in church placed anyone in an awkward position.’ I think Mrs. Harcourt saw me glance at Ina as I spoke, for she immediately suggested whether Mr. Harcourt would take her into the conservatory to see some new plants, and when we were alone she said—

‘You are so good-natured, you never make remarks; but people will talk, and, of course, they laughed and gossiped last Sunday when Henry Anson joined the choir; and I just thought that, for poor Miss Randolph’s sake, I would take an opportunity of suggesting to you that it might be undesirable. You will pardon me, I am sure.’

‘Certainly,’ I replied; ‘but, Mrs. Harcourt, I am not the manager of the choir, Mr. L’Estrange is the responsible person. If you think there is any want of wisdom in its formation, you will do better to apply to him.’

‘You take things so seriously. There is nothing to apply to anyone about. It is only a matter for suggestion; and if it were otherwise, I should not choose to interfere with any of the rector’s peculiar arrangements. All I felt was, as I said, for poor Miss Randolph. It would be a pity to bring her too much into association with a person who, of course, could never really be anything to her—at least, with the consent of his friends.’

‘You still speak riddles,’ I said. ‘I object quite as much as you can to bringing young people into intimate association when there is any such impossibility as that to which you refer. But in the present instance I con-

fess I do not see where the impossibility lies ; and, therefore, I should not trouble myself about the matter, except so far as to endeavour to avoid exciting any foolish gossip.'

'Which will be extremely difficult, so long as Mr. Anson is seen every Sunday by Miss Randolph's side at the harmonium. As to the impossibility, if you do not see it, I really don't know that I can explain it. I should have imagined that it would have been self-evident. At any rate, I am quite sure that the last thing my dear friends the Ansons would desire would be an intermarriage with a Randolph.'

'Then,' I said, 'I conclude they will take measures to prevent it.'

'No doubt. I only thought,—as you appear to be Miss Randolph's friend—but perhaps you are right—interference in these cases often does more harm than good. Happily, Henry Anson is going away soon. Captain Shaw and he are to have some shooting on an estate of Sir John's in the North. They go next week, so I hear from Lydia, my second daughter, who is staying at the Manor. Lady Anson so much wished her to be there before the young party broke up. They are all such great friends.'

To this I made no reply. Ina came back from the conservatory, and we took our leave.

Ina was eager in her indignation at Mrs. Harcourt's tone when speaking of Marietta. 'Mamma, what could she mean by talking of Marietta in that compassionating way? Poor Miss Randolph! I don't see why she is to be called poor. And then the idea of Marietta's placing herself in an awkward position! I was so glad when you said you didn't understand. One thing I am sure of, that Marietta is worth twenty times as much as Lydia Harcourt, for she is a horror!'

‘What do you know of her?’ I said.

‘Oh! Marietta complained to me one day of her haughty manner; and she behaved so badly in church last Sunday, she never took her eyes off the singers; and I don’t think she troubled herself about us till Mr. Anson joined us.’

‘Ina, dear,’ I said, ‘that is just the way gossiping, ill-natured stories are formed and spread; and, moreover, it is not very refined, and certainly not very reverent. How could you see that Miss Harcourt was looking at the singers, unless you watched her yourself?’

Ina blushed. ‘Well, mamma, perhaps it is not quite right; but I don’t like Lydia Harcourt, and I do like—I love Marietta very much.’

I did not discuss this conclusion, for I confess Miss Harcourt is not very much to my taste, nor, as I cannot help suspecting, to Mr. Anson’s, though Mrs. Harcourt’s tone was, I could not help thinking, intended to give me an idea of something more than mere intimacy between the families. At any rate, I am heartily glad that he is going away for the present, so that there may be no cause for foolish reports about him and Marietta.

November 20.—The Confirmation, I find, is likely to be the third week in February, and Mrs. Penryhn writes me word that she shall not be satisfied unless she has us with her for a month. She begs me to fix my own time. Her invitation is most hearty and hospitable, including us all; and I am thankful for this, as I should have greatly disliked sending the girls to Arling for a month without me. I have proposed to go about December 9, and stay till about January 7. This arrangement hurries me very much now, but it will give us a few weeks of quiet at home before the Confirmation. I told the children to-day what I had decided upon. Ina was in ecstasies at the idea of going back to Arling. I don’t think Cecil

cared as much about it. She is growing so fond of this place and our settled life. Her first thought was for Charley and Agnes and the little ones. She seemed satisfied when I told her they were to go with us, and said that she should so much like her grandmamma and her cousins at Barton Lodge to see them. We talked also about the Confirmation. Ina took it, I am afraid, as a matter of course. Cecil was very grave, but said little. I settled to begin reading with them every day, in preparation for it. They will not go to the rector till after their return. I tried to find out from Mrs. Bradshaw, whom I saw yesterday, what the rector's preparation was likely to be. Her answer was not very enlightening.

'I can't say, my dear. I should imagine he would put them through a course of the Fathers. Confirmation is, as you and I know, a very different matter from what it used to be. When I was confirmed, our good old vicar (he was good in his way) heard me my Catechism, and then told me not to be frightened, for Confirmation was a very simple process. I found it so, in the way it was conducted.'

I suppose I looked grave, for Mrs. Bradshaw turned upon me with the accusation 'You are so alarmingly reverent, my dear; so constantly on the *qui vive* to find out what is naughty in one's words. I think of Confirmation just as seriously as you do, and only wish I could come and be taught by you. I am sure your instructions would be much more effective than the rector's references.'

'They will have very little to do with references,' I said. 'A mother's part in the matter is merely to touch upon individual and lesser moral questions, which the clergyman cannot be supposed to know much about.'

'But your children are paragons, I am quite sure. I should not wonder if Cecil were to answer, as a young friend of mine did; who, when asked, as a Confirmation

question, whether there was anything in the Bible she did not understand, replied, "no."

I laughed, and hoped that Cecil was beginning to learn that there were a great many things in the Bible which she was never to expect to understand. I should have taught her to very little purpose otherwise.

'A perfect Solomon! only you are a woman. I believe I have called you so before; but I always leave you with the profoundest regret that Solomon never had the opportunity of an introduction to you. Good-bye.'

What impression I should have made upon Solomon it is of course impossible to imagine, but I quite well know what impression I make upon myself, now that I am undertaking to guide and teach these two girls, at a time which so often proves the turning-point of life. Yet I cannot, with any satisfaction, give the matter entirely over to the rector; because, after all, he can know little or nothing about the children's characters; and if he could, he is so very singular in his ways, that I doubt much whether he would be able to reach their hearts. That is one great disadvantage of the tone there is in the parish just now about him, and which, with all my regard and esteem for Mrs. Bradshaw, she certainly does encourage. Everyone finds fault, everyone laughs, whilst everyone at the same time acknowledges his real excellence. Ina and Cecil, and Agnes too, have heard this kind of absurd criticism—it has been simply impossible for me to keep them from it, and I am not quite sure whether it would have been better in the end if I could have done so. They must learn to take human beings, whether clergy or laity, as they are; to value them for the good that is in them, whilst they own their weaknesses and errors. If they were to pin their faith implicitly upon any one individual, then, the moment they discovered any fault, they would perhaps lose faith in all human goodness.

Anyhow, I have had no choice in the matter. People have spoken incautiously before them, and they themselves are quite quick enough to notice what is peculiar or absurd. For myself, I have strictly set my face against any discussion upon the rector. I was seriously angry on the only occasion when I heard Ina mimicking him, and I always speak of him myself with the respect which I really feel. All beyond I must leave; it is in God's hands; He is really educating the children. Still, as regards the present moment, I am both anxious and ignorant. I have been looking at Bishop Nicholson on the Catechism—a seventeenth century book; quaint, as one might expect, and catechetical in form, which makes it dry; but I think I shall take it as my text-book. Those old divines carry such weight with them. Their voices come to us from the dead, and their earnestness is so pathetically simple, so entirely without any striving after effect. Ina is a little wanting in reverence, but I think she will listen with a sense of being taught by authority to a bishop who lived two centuries ago. And what is especially important, they will both, I hope, see by his arguments, that the English Church rests upon the triple foundation of the Bible, Reason, and Antiquity; and so will be less likely to be shaken and troubled by all the varied forms of belief and opinion which are now abroad. I could not put the book into their hand, they would find it wearisome; but a little reading, and a little talking over what is read, will, I hope, make it palatable. The comfort of having a seventeenth century divine as a backbone for conversation will be incalculable.

CHAPTER XXI.

November 25.—Time runs on fast, and I am full of business in anticipation of leaving home ; but in the midst of it my thoughts turn to Woodleigh. Mrs. Randolph's face of misery yesterday in church has haunted me ever since. I have not ventured to make any remark upon it. Mrs. Bradshaw is the only person I could speak to, and I have not seen her. Marietta has not been near us for the last five days, and nurse said last week that Mrs. Randolph was ill, and that Miss Randolph was waiting upon her. But, anyhow, they were at church yesterday, both of them ; the only members of the Woodleigh society who were. I believe, though, the visitors are nearly all gone ; only one gentleman and his wife, foreigners, Germans I fancy, remain. He is a Baron somebody. It seems unkind not to try and do more for one's near neighbour, when one suspects some sudden grief or calamity. Ina, who noticed Mrs. Randolph's looks just as I did, begged me to write a note to Marietta, and ask what was the matter, but that is impossible. If I can do anything Marietta will come to me. I think she would prefer me to Mrs. Bradshaw. I am sorry—not glad. Mrs. Bradshaw knows so much more of the family affairs than I do ; and her good sense and kindness of heart would make her an invaluable friend ; only Marietta does not, as the saying is, take to her.

Mr. Anson is really gone with Captain Shaw to fish or shoot, or something of the kind ; so that worry is off my mind. I suspect Mrs. Harcourt must have had more

motive than appeared for the remarks she made to me the other day ; for the common report in the village now is that Mr. Anson and Miss Lydia Harcourt are to be married. People don't say engaged, from which I conclude that, if there is any truth in the rumour, it merely means that the heads of the two families desire the alliance; and if so, they would naturally look with disquiet upon any symptoms of a dawning preference in another quarter, especially if it happened to be preference for a Randolph. Very fond as I am of Marietta, I have just the uncomfortable association with her which enables me to sympathise with this feeling. As the wild ducks, in Andersen's Tales, said to the ugly duck, 'we don't care so long as you don't want to marry into our family.' Cold and worldly that sounds. I don't like myself the better for having the feeling, but I would rather acknowledge it.

November 26. — My little Agnes troubles me. Her morbid conscientiousness shows itself so strongly, and I don't know how to check it without doing her a moral injury. And then, too, she is by no means immaculate in great things, though she is so distressed when she errs in little ones. It is most important for her to exert her mind, and she knows this. She has excellent abilities, and really thinks deeply for her age. But, generally speaking, she only dreams; she does not reason, because she will not exert herself to acquire the facts which are absolutely necessary as a foundation for reason. And so I constantly find her wandering off into speculations which seem marvellous for a child of her age, but which really lead to nothing.

It is very provoking to be obliged to bring her down from her airy imaginations to the atmosphere of reality; it makes me appear so unsympathising; but really this theoretical speculative tendency not only weakens her intellect, but absolutely clouds her moral sense. She thinks

so much about abstract right and wrong that she cannot recognise them practically, or at least not in a sensible rational way. She came to me this morning with a difficulty about the nature of sin—*à propos* to something she had read about Draco's code, and the theory that all offences deserve the same punishment. Of course she was out of her depth directly, for the thoughts were naturally enough childish and confused; but all the more difficult it was to answer her. When I said to her that sins were great or small according to our knowledge, and that a person who was ignorant and did wrong, was not as guilty in God's sight as one who had been well taught and yet sinned, she went off into questions about herself;—how was she to know in her own case whether a sin was great or little? and if she thought a thing to be wrong, was it wrong because she thought it so? and if she believed that others were doing wrong, would God be angry with her for not trying to stop them? I was quite troubled to see her eagerness as she asked these questions, which, after all, I could not answer so definitely as entirely to satisfy her; and since then I have been thinking that there must be something working in her little mind to give rise to them. With all her morbidness, she seldom has such a fit of perplexity as she had to-day. I was obliged to stop her at last, by telling her that she would do better to think of how pleased God would be with her if she did right, than of how angry He would be if she did wrong. I made her see that, as regarded myself, she was not always troubling herself about the possibility of vexing me. She loved me, and wished to do what I desired, and that kept her straight. I was quite aware, as I said this, that a morbid conscience and a metaphysical mind would not be satisfied with it; but when I attempted to answer her difficulties separately I found that I was only increasing them. The question, for instance, as to whether a thing is wrong because we

think it to be so;—at the first moment one should say yes, certainly, and quote St. Paul: ‘To him that esteemeth anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean’ (Rom. xiv. 14). But if I had said this to my little Agnes I should have opened the door to a whole world of scruples. With her fidgety conscience, she would have converted every passing misgiving, however strained and absurd, into an absolute doubt as to the lawfulness of her actions, and then would have worried herself unmercifully because she had not listened to it. So all the strength and power of her mind would have been wasted. And yet it is absolutely necessary—more necessary than words can say—to make children attend to the misgivings of conscience. The risks which they run if they are not taught this are really frightful. I hope I quieted Agnes a little at last, and in some degree I certainly quieted myself, by telling her that, as a general rule, she need not trouble herself as to whether things were right or wrong except so far as I had given direct orders about them; and supposing she could not satisfy her mind in this way, then she must be quite sure that if she was tempted to do or say anything which she would not like to mention to me that must be wrong. The cloud of morbidness grew less after this, but it did not entirely vanish. If I can only instil into her mind the principle of love—the thought of her Saviour’s approbation instead of His displeasure—she will, I think and believe, by degrees lose this scrupulosity, especially if I can strengthen her reasoning faculties. But she is so timid and nervous now that any overstraining of the conscience may do her an injury for life. I took the opportunity to-day of making some remarks about careless exercises and imperfect lessons. They are, in her case, safer subjects for comment and self-examination than principles and feelings. I was just saying something about the last point which troubled her, as to whether she

was bound to try and stop everything she thought wrong, when a visitor interrupted us, and I have not had an opportunity of speaking to her since; but I shall tell her that she has nothing to do just now except with herself, and setting a good example. Once allow her to think that it is her duty to interfere and set the world right, and she will make herself and everyone about her miserable. In fact, her goodness (and she is wonderfully good) will become quite useless if one cannot manage to put a little reason and common sense into it. The true conscience and the false conscience, what mysteries they are!

November 28.—No wonder Mrs. Randolph has been looking wretched. I have had a note from her. She begs the loan of fifty pounds for a few days. A long vista of evil opened before me when I read the request. To apply to me, and not to her husband! What can it mean? And to ask such a favour of a stranger—not even to go to Mrs. Bradshaw or Mr. L'Estrange! There must be something wrong. And yet I pity her: from my heart I pity her. Those few words of Mrs. Bradshaw's, implying that the Woodleigh visitors gambled, must be the clue to the mystery. What can Marietta know of it? And is it possible that in any way it may come to Ina's ears? The note was written in the strictest confidence; I dare not therefore mention the subject to Mrs. Bradshaw. I have not fifty pounds to spare; and this was all I could say. I tried not to write coldly. A woman brought up in luxury, and living, as Mrs. Randolph does, in apparent affluence, must be reduced to such wretched anxiety before she could be induced to lay her difficulties before an ordinary acquaintance. Let her be as weak and wilful as she may, yet I must pity her. Marietta keeps away. Perhaps she knew what request was impending. I believe she would starve rather than make it herself. But

that is a fault on the other side. There might be circumstances in which it would be more than justifiable.

November 30.—I have had a rather stiff note from Mrs. Randolph, apologising for having troubled me, saying that the pressure was only accidental, and she had been able to make arrangements to meet it. I must take her at her word, but it is strange. Strange also was a little incident which occurred yesterday afternoon. With Mrs. Randolph's note came a tiny pencil note from Marietta to Ina, asking if we should be going to Westford this afternoon. No reason was given for the question. At the moment I thought we should not go, for it looked very likely to rain. So Ina sent back word 'most probably not.' After dinner the sun came out, and I thought we might venture, for there were many little things to be done. Cecil and Agnes went with me, but not Ina, who had a slight cold. She was very desirous though that I should send in word to Marietta that we had changed our minds, as it was likely, she said, that Marietta would wish to go with us. I was unwilling to do so, disliking the constant communication with Woodleigh, especially just now. Whilst we were talking, nurse, who came into the room, told us that she had seen Miss Randolph walk down the lane, so that it would have been no use to send to her. Ina, I know, thought it hard in me not to wish for Marietta; and this grieved me, as it always does, when I give her the impression of want of sympathy, for I am aware that I lose influence by it. I thought afterwards whether I might not have done good if I could have had Marietta to myself, as I might have persuaded her to tell me what is amiss. But I believe I was right. It does not do to put oneself out of one's way to gain confidence with regard to other people's affairs, even with the best intentions. If they were only Marietta's it would be a different matter, but they are Mrs. Randolph's, and there-

fore can be no concern of mine, until they are plainly brought before me.

Shopping afternoons in Westford are always very much alike. One so often meets the same persons. To-day, though, there were more gentlemen than ladies. Sir John Anson, Mr. Digby, and Mr. L'Estrange were at the jeweller's when we went in to get a chain mended for Cecil. I laughed at the rector, and told him I should spread the report that he was looking after the gay world and neglecting his parish;—a safe threat, for whatever other sins he may have upon his conscience, neglecting his parish is certainly not one. He gave me one of his grim smiles, and went on with some political discussion he had begun with Mr. Digby and Sir John. I was glad to see that Sir John was quite friendly in his manner to him. It is only upon petty parish matters that he is cantankerous; and I believe if the ladies would but let matters rest and not fan the embers of discord, we might eventually all learn to work together. At least I never can believe that the rector is so essentially wilful and obstinate as people assert he is. The three gentlemen stood in the doorway. I went up to the counter with Cecil, and did not observe that there was anyone else in the shop, till Agnes said to me in a low voice, 'Mamma, look, there is Marietta.' She was at the farthest end. The shop is very long, and rather dark at the upper extremity, and it was a little late in the afternoon, but there was no mistaking her. She was talking very earnestly to Mr. Cairn, the jeweller, and he was holding something up to the light, I could not see what; but when he would have come forward with it she prevented him. Agnes would have gone up to her if I had not interposed. I had an instinctive feeling that, whatever was going on, Marietta would not wish to be interrupted. Suddenly, however, she turned round, and such a start she gave

when she saw us ; it really was like the start of fear ; but she recovered herself directly, and came forward. I went up to meet her ; and as I drew near, she so very pointedly placed herself between me and Mr. Cairn, that she actually drew my attention to him, and then I could not help seeing that he held in his hand a very beautiful diamond star. Of course I made no remark upon it, but I am sure Marietta saw that I had noticed it. She is so natural and impulsive at all times that it is simply impossible for her to conceal anything she feels, and her nervous hesitating uncomfortable manner showed that she was ill at ease. I explained to her how it was that we had changed our minds and had not told her, and then I asked how she happened to be at Westford. The answer was that she had walked in by herself ; and I own it made me feel a little conscience-stricken, for I thought we might have taken more pains to find her.

‘But,’ she added immediately, ‘I could not have come with you. I was not sure what I was going to do till the last moment.’

‘You will walk back with us though,’ I said ; ‘it is so late.’

‘No, thank you, no : I have business. I don’t mind being late.’

‘But you must mind it, my dear,’ I said. ‘It is not fitting. You must let me take a middle-aged lady’s privilege, and be decided.’

‘It can’t be, indeed ; I must manage. Oh ! please forgive me.’

The poor child’s face was so distressed, that it was out of the question for me to press the matter any further, though I said I was very sorry.

Sir John just then turned round, and in his good-natured way, asked what was the matter ; and when he was told, Mr. Digby made a rather satirical remark upon young

ladies' romantic fancies for solitary walks. Mr. L'Estrange said nothing, but wandered into the interior of the shop to speak to Mr. Cairn. Marietta's eye followed him furtively, and I saw that she turned very pale, but I did not remark anything more, for I was bent upon making Sir John offer to take her home in his phaeton. Henry Anson being in Wales it seemed a safe proposal. Marietta went back to speak to Mr. Cairn, and I heard her say that she was going elsewhere, and would return again almost immediately. She took no notice of the rector, neither did he take any notice of her. During those few moments I enquired of Sir John whether Lady Anson and his daughters were with him, and found he was alone; and then I lamented again that Marietta could not walk back with us, and so at last I brought him to the desired point; and when Marietta was leaving the shop he stopped her and offered to take her home in his carriage in half an hour's time, if she could be ready. Marietta would have declined the offer, I suspect, if I had not been standing by; but though I said nothing—for I was afraid that her pride might take offence if I attempted anything like direct interference—yet she knew perfectly well that I should disapprove of her walking home alone so late. So the proposal was acceded to, and Marietta departed. I thought we might have had the rector's company on our way home; but no, we left him in the shop; and I think he was examining the diamond star, which had been the subject of discussion between Marietta and Mr. Cairn. I could not help noticing it, because it is so unlike him to take any interest in such things.

CHAPTER XXII.

December 3.—Curiously enough, I have been in Mrs. Bradshaw's house to-day, for only the third time since we came to Dernham. The fact is, that she lives just so much out of the village, and away from Westford, that it is a matter of business for me to go and see her, whereas I am precisely in her way, whenever she is going into the town. Then, too, I am more tied down to home than she is. As I often tell her, I am not a lady at large. She has asked me to dine with her several times, but it has never been convenient to me to go: and, in fact, we have arrived at a kind of tacit compact that she is to come to me, but that I am not to be expected to go to her.

To-day, however, I had a note from her, saying that 'she was laid up with a cold, but wanted to see me very much. Could I go over to Beechwood to luncheon?' And accordingly I went; for there were many things I wished to say to her before leaving home—little matters about some of the poor people, and the choir, to say nothing of Marietta and Woodleigh.

Beechwood is a small place, excessively snug, but rather provoking, because it wants view. There is only one peep of the sea, from an opening just in front of the cottage, otherwise it is quite shut in by trees. It just suits Mrs. Bradshaw, it is so quaint. The cottage could originally have been nothing but a labourer's or small farmer's house; but it has been added to, and the additions have been made in the same style as the original building; so that the rooms are, for the most part,

all low, with oak beams across; only at the further end of the long narrow drawing-room it has been thought necessary to give height by a kind of vaulted ceiling. The room has also been widened by deeply-recessed oriel windows, and at the same time shaded by a few panes of coloured glass, giving it altogether an artistic, yet rather sombre tone. The dining-room is of the same character, and there is a pleasant little study, opening into, what Mrs. Bradshaw calls her den—a tiny room, distinguished by a most comfortable untidiness—papers, books, pamphlets, writing materials, work-boxes, baskets, large photographs resting upon tables against the wall—everything one could desire, in fact, and a great deal more, so that it is quite a surprise to find that space is left in the room for an easy chair and a comfortable sofa. There is very little view from the window, but this is rather atoned for by the brilliant flowers in the little conservatory, into which the room opens; and then, as Mrs. Bradshaw says (though I don't agree with her in taste), when she is tired of work or of play, instead of staring out of the window at soulless things, which can't respond, she can refresh her mind by the prints and photographs of her numerous friends and her historical favourites which cover the walls. The upstairs rooms are nothing very remarkable, and there are but few of them. They are to be well filled this winter; for Colonel Bradshaw and his wife, and two children, are expected to spend Christmas at Beechwood. We had a cosy little luncheon in the den. Mrs. Bradshaw informed me that she made it a matter of conscience to keep her servants in good order, by generally having everything in fitting style, and taking her dinner in the dining-room; she even allowed herself to be waited upon and watched whilst eating a mutton-chop. But every now and then she gave herself a dispensation, and took to her den, and then her repast, whatever it might

be, was brought in upon a tray, and she sat by the fire with a book, and allowed herself to forget that men and women lived to eat, but rather took the other view, that they ate to live.

‘Don’t think me a heretic, though, my dear,’ she said—and she drew the table nearer the fire, and looked round with great satisfaction when the door closed, and the neat little parlour-maid had left us to ourselves. ‘Don’t imagine that I despise conventionalities, as it is the fashion to call the decencies of life. I respect them from the bottom of my heart. I believe that we have all an element of the savage in us which would carry us back to barbarism if it were not for conventionalities. Dress boots are most worthy of respect; but then slippers are so comfortable. I never let my son appear in them though, and as for the children, I expect them to dress for me every evening as regularly as if I were the Queen. So now, let me give you a wing of this pheasant. Sir John sent it me two days ago.’

We ate our luncheon—so called—though I suspect it was really dinner for both of us, talking on all kinds of indifferent subjects; and then, when the tray had been removed, drew our chairs close in to the fire, and prepared for a confidential chat, Mrs. Bradshaw having given definite orders that no visitors were to be admitted.

‘And now,’ she began, ‘you want to know what I have particularly to say to you?’

‘Something about Woodleigh, I suppose; unless you have come to the resolution to make a humble apology to the rector, and ask him to admit you as a teacher in his Sunday-school whilst I am away, which is what I want you to do.’

Mrs. Bradshaw laughed. ‘I felt convinced that you had some purpose of your own in view when you accepted my invitation for to-day so readily. But you will find

me immovable. I stand upon principle, and principle, as you know, is a rock. It is Woodleigh I must speak to you about. Mrs. Randolph has asked you to lend her fifty pounds?’

I started. ‘Surely no one—’ I began.

‘Don’t be afraid. There are no eaves-droppers or spies in Dernham; but the fact is a fact.’

‘Yes,’ I said, ‘Mrs. Randolph asked, and I refused.’

‘Even so; and she may ask you again.’

‘Scarcely,’ I said, ‘considering the cold tone of her answer.’

‘She may ask you again,’ repeated Mrs. Bradshaw; ‘were she twenty times as cold, she may be driven to it; but you must refuse.’

‘Certainly I must; for I have not the money to spare.’

‘And what is more, you must take care that no communications of any kind pass between your Ina and her.’

‘My Ina! For pity’s sake, dear Mrs. Bradshaw, tell me what you mean.’

‘Ina writes to her grandmother, does she not? Do you see the letters?’

‘No,’ I said. ‘I cannot interfere between Ina and her grandmother. Of course, there can be no harm in the letters.’

‘No harm intended; but harm may be done. I will be plain with you. There is no good in concealment, and if you think me a busybody I must e’en be contented to bear the accusation. Mrs. Randolph is in difficulties, there is no need to tell you that. Those people who were with her gambled, and so did she. I don’t say she is ruined; but she has gone far beyond her husband’s allowance, and she dares not apply to him for help. Last week she sent for me. She was in great need of fifty pounds; the identical fifty for which she applied to you.

I could not help her, or at least I would not; and I will tell you why. A month ago I lent—or rather gave—her forty, upon the strict promise that she would not touch a card for six months. At the end of that time I hoped to get the promise renewed. Of course it had been broken, and the result was the loss of every penny of ready money, and the additional debt of fifty pounds.'

'But you once told me Mrs. Randolph was true?' I said.

'Even so; but truth of character is not necessarily strength. I think people often make a mistake, and believe that it is; and trust and try it too far. Mrs. Randolph will never say anything which is not true, but she will often, through weakness and wilfulness, act it. Anyhow, she broke her promise, and I would not aid her except upon a condition, to which she refused to accede.'

'A second condition!' I said. 'That seems rather too trusting when the first had been broken.'

'It seems so; but it was a condition which, if she had consented to, I could have enforced. I insisted upon her writing at once to her husband, begging him to come to Woodleigh; and then putting herself and her affairs entirely in his hands. It was a terrible condition to make, knowing what he is; but anything short of this would, I felt, only bring a more certain ruin in the end; and Julia Randolph knew quite well that, so far as any good offices of mine could avail, I would beard the lion in his den without the slightest hesitation. All that I required was Mr. Randolph's presence on the spot.'

'But,' I said, 'fifty pounds is, after all, not such a very large sum for a person in Mrs. Randolph's position.'

'No doubt; but if your butcher or baker demands it, and threatens that if he is not paid he will proclaim that you are unable to pay; and if you know that, the moment

that is said, you will have claims upon you to the amount of hundreds, why it does become a matter of importance to stop the first outcry. This was unhappily Mrs. Randolph's case.'

'She must be out of her senses,' I said, 'to suppose that this kind of thing can go on long.'

'So I told her; but her motto is "take care of the present, and let the future take care of itself;" a wise motto in some cases, but liable to perversion. The end of it all was, that we parted, not, I fear, on the best of terms, and, as I found afterwards from Marietta, she turned for assistance to you.'

'Mrs. Randolph obtained the money from some one,' I said, 'for she sent me word that she had made arrangements, and did not need it.'

'I think I can tell how she got it,' said Mrs. Bradshaw thoughtfully, 'Marietta wrote me a few words, saying that it was all right. Her great dread was, lest Lady Chase should be applied to; and if it had come to that, I think I must have been weak, and yielded anything rather than give that woman an additional hold over this poor thing!'

I was silent. I could not feel sufficiently charitable to say 'poor thing!'

Mrs. Bradshaw went on, 'You need not tell me what you are thinking; I know it. But she is "poor thing" all the more for her unutterable folly. You see now that the storm is only over for the moment; it must return sooner or later, and I am thankful that you and yours are likely to be out of the way of it.'

'Thank you,' I said; 'but really I don't see how it could in any way affect me, except so far as I am interested in Marietta; and certainly I can't understand what your allusion to Ina just now could possibly mean.'

'Cold and proud, and very virtuous! Much too vir-

tuous to be mixed up with anything so far from respectable as Julia Randolph's affairs !'

'Well,' I said, 'I will own candidly that it is all very repugnant to me, and that it makes me rather cross. For myself alone I care not in the least, and if I could help Mrs. Randolph, or any other unhappy person in her circumstances, by a personal sacrifice, I would do it, I hope, willingly. But I must look at these things in a different light, when the children's names are in any degree, however remote, associated with them. As to Ina's communications with her grandmother, it is simply impossible that they can have anything to do with Mrs. Randolph. The post is open to all, and if Mrs. Randolph wishes to write to Mrs. Penrhyn, she can do so without having recourse to Ina as a go-between.'

'Possibly; and yet she may not choose that her servants should have the opportunity—as they always have—of knowing who her correspondents are. Or yet further, she may not choose to run the risk of having her letters opened.'

'Impossible!' I said; 'in these days, in a private family—such a thing could not be.'

'I only know that Mrs. Randolph suspects it,' was the reply—'whether justly or unjustly, I can't pretend to say; but the effect is the same, either way. The servants are chosen by her husband, and paid directly by him; and he is a man of a most jealous and suspicious temper. His wife is at heart true to him. He knows it. He has never had any real cause of complaint against her, except for wilfulness, temper, and extravagance; and yet he behaves towards her as if she might at any moment forsake him. This is the reason why I detest Mr. Randolph, and why, to the very last, I will stand by his misguided and unhappy wife.'

'And you think,' I said, 'that, in order to avoid this

possible *espionage*, Mrs. Randolph has, without my knowledge, made use of a young girl like Ina.' I know that I spoke bitterly, for I was indescribably pained.

'Yes, I do think so. I believe that before Mrs. Randolph applied to me for the fifty pounds, she had applied to Mrs. Penrhyn for help, and received it; and I believe also, that Ina had something to do with its transmission. The suspicion was suggested to me in a curious way—through a mistake in a bank account. I had to make inquiry about some cheques which had been paid in; I thought there must have been one more than there actually was. The cashier, in looking into the matter, ran his eye over his book, and I heard the names Randolph and Penrhyn muttered. They attracted me, because I was quite aware at the time of the Woodleigh embarrassments. Afterwards, Mrs. Randolph and Marietta were making some calculations, and Mrs. Randolph was obliged to own that she had received—thirty pounds, I think—from a quarter which she did not name, and of which Marietta knew nothing. I asked no questions, of course, but as we went on with our business I happened to take up an envelope to write down some figures upon it. I asked if I might use it. Marietta looked at it, and remarked directly, that the handwriting was Ina's. She looked quite surprised, and Mrs. Randolph replied, with evident hesitation, that "she had had no note from Ina—only an enclosure." Now, I may have put two and two together wrongly. I tell you the facts just as they stand. They don't involve any great blame to anyone, but I think you will do well to put Ina on her guard. Without in the least intending it, she may bring herself and others into great difficulty by connecting herself, even indirectly, with Mrs. Randolph's affairs.'

'Thank you, very heartily,' I said; 'I understand; and I shall be quite open with Ina. But you must allow, that

if the case should be proved, I shall have cause to dread, and even to dislike, Mrs. Randolph. No woman of good feeling could do as she appears to have done. She must have intended her correspondence to be kept secret, or Ina would have named it to me. I do feel pained, greatly pained. I cannot call Mrs. Randolph true.'

'Even so; you have cause to be pained; and Mrs. Randolph, if she has acted as we suspect, has not been entirely true. And yet, there are persons who have never done what she has done, and whom it would be impossible to convict of falsehood, and who are nevertheless, to my mind, infinitely more untrustworthy. Go to Julia Randolph, and ask her what the facts of the case are, and she will tell you precisely, even to the very minutest particulars. Let the action be one deserving of blame, and she will accept that blame. I never knew her try to put off the wrong-doing upon another. I never knew her twist, and turn, and evade, and misconstrue, and try to divert attention from the main point by defending herself upon some minor one. These are the things which give me the idea of an untrue and insincere character. In the present case, I believe, there was no intentional insincerity. Mrs. Randolph did not feel that she was doing anyone harm by simply begging Ina to enclose a note for her. It would never enter her head that a girl ought not to do that sort of thing unknown to her mother, because she never lived with a mother or had any experience of a mother's care. From infancy she has been tossed about from one to another. There are infinite excuses to be made for her.'

'So I see,' was my reply; 'and yet I am annoyed—more than annoyed, I am thoroughly put out—both with Mrs. Randolph and Ina. It will require a good deal of thought and effort before I can look at the case fairly, or judge it dispassionately. So you must let me go home

and think by myself, and try to get myself into a right frame of mind.'

'And remember, as a preliminary, that you are angry upon suspicion only,' said Mrs. Bradshaw.

'Which I shall very soon make certainty,' I answered.

Mrs. Bradshaw looked surprised and distressed, and I was instantly conscious how strongly I had spoken.

'Please forgive me,' I said. 'I am no saint, though I would fain be one. You have done quite rightly and kindly. And indeed I will try to be calm-judging.'

'The world says you are that always,' said Mrs. Bradshaw.

'The world knows nothing about me,' I replied. 'It sees results, and it little guesses how those results have been obtained. If we had been playfellows in childhood you would understand better what the volcanic nature is, which it has been the effort of years to keep down.'

So we parted.

CHAPTER XXIII.

December 8. Clarendon House, Hampstead.—‘Boast not thyself of to-morrow.’ I left Mrs. Bradshaw only five days ago, went home, found a telegraphic message from Mr. Pierce, telling me that Charley had a kind of gastric fever, and was considered to be in danger. That evening I went up to London alone, and was at Hampstead by nine o’clock. My boy was very ill, so ill that at the first sight of him, my hope (I have scarcely any at any time) utterly failed. I even found it difficult to pray. It seemed so evident that the decree had gone forth, that I could not believe in the possibility of its being reversed. I did pray, however, and the danger is over, and I can look back with thankfulness unutterable. But it grieves me that I had so little faith. I can scarcely remember now what I felt; I only know that I poured forth petitions, confessions, without connection. I said all that I should have said to the most comprehending of human friends, and so I found—what I little deserved—resignation, if not hope. God only knows,—He only can see, what this mortal life would be without prayer;—its intense, awful loneliness. I never felt it so strongly before. I never before knew fully what it was to be permitted to live in the perpetual consciousness of a loving, tender, protecting, and all-wise Presence, so that, in one’s grief, one could speak—one could listen to the inner voice of one’s own thoughts, and know that there was a secret response. In the long nights of unutterable suspense, what should I have done without it? It seems now, as if every moment that I am alone

must be spent in thanking God that He has saved me from the crushing pain of a solitary grief; that I do not know what it is; and that, while He is, I never can know it. Anxiety I have still. The physicians are cautious, and insist upon the greatest watchfulness and unremitting care. Happily, an excellent nurse has been engaged, and the kindness and thoughtfulness of Mrs. Pierce and her sister are more than I can describe. For them it has been a most trying time; but my coming to them was a great relief. Charley's room is in a wing of the house, quite away from the noise of the school, and I have a comfortable apartment close to it. The tone of the place is strange to me; mostly men and boys to be seen about, and everything going on, so far as I am mixed up with it, in a rough, independent way, which is totally unlike the quiet finish—if I may so call it—of my own home life. Much better for Charley, no doubt. It will all tend to make a man of him. But it is not suited for illness, and I long to carry him back to Dernham. That, however, will not be practicable now, for the children are all at Arling. Their plans have been settled with very little reference to me. The Arling journey, I felt, could not be stopped, but the details of it I was obliged to leave to nurse, as she was on the spot; and I told her to go to Mrs. Bradshaw for advice if she should be in a difficulty. Ina wrote to her grandmamma, informing her exactly how things were; and the answer came back that, instead of waiting till the 9th, it would be better for them all to move to Arling at once. Mrs. Penryhn, with her usual fashion of arranging what everyone is to do, settled the day and the hour for the journey, and took it for granted there would be no objection. No time was left for any application to me. Nurse went, as I told her, to Mrs. Bradshaw, who took upon herself the responsibility of sanctioning the plan, and so it was all done; and now my

children are at Arling—the place I have looked upon with an especial, though possibly an unwise and exaggerated misgiving—without me, under the entire guidance of Mrs. Penryhn; and likely to remain so, I cannot pretend to say how long, for I cannot leave Charley till he is able to travel with me.

There is one consolation, however, in the arrangement. Mrs. Bradshaw writes me word, that she consented to it gladly, because, on thinking matters over, she was more and more convinced that her suspicions respecting Mrs. Randolph's communications, made through Ina, were correct; and she felt that during my absence there might even be personal communications, bringing, in the end, very awkward results. This consideration made her think that the sooner Ina was removed from Mrs. Randolph's neighbourhood the better. I quite agree with her; yet we must go back to Dernham in a few weeks. That, however, I need not trouble myself about at present. I have thought of writing to Ina, but I am afraid. If she should misunderstand anything I might say, I should do more harm than good; and I cannot be insensible to the fact that, at Arling, all the old influences will renew their power, and that Ina will see with her grandmother's eyes and judge with her judgment, and Mrs. Randolph is evidently one of Mrs. Penryhn's favourites. Since then I have had news of the children's arrival, but giving very few details.

December 12.—A packet from Arling, full of delight at the good account of Charley. Mrs. Penryhn herself writes, to congratulate me. The journey was very pleasant, Ina says, for the day was fine. For myself, I took no notice of the weather on that day. The question of life or death was being decided for my boy, and all else was a blank. The letters are very characteristic. Ina writes well; her hand is formed: she expresses herself easily,

and tells me all she thinks may interest me ; but I plead guilty to a little, perhaps not a little, jealousy at the extreme delight which she evinces at revisiting Arling. And I thought I was not jealous ! How little one knows oneself ! I think I should feel it less, if I could be assured that Mrs. Penryhn would be a safe guide, but I dare say I am mistaken. Miss Penryhn—aunt Bessie—is going away, so Ina tells me, for a few days, and therefore her grandmamma is particularly glad to have her there. Cecil, who writes a rough, clear, unformed hand, says little about her feelings, but tells me what they have been doing, and especially what a pleasant ride she has had to Barton,—uncle George's place, about two miles from Arling ;—uncle George being Mr. Huddersfield, an uncle-in-law. He married Mrs. Penryhn's eldest daughter, Maria. Cecil is very loving in her inquiries for me ; but I don't think she has at all understood Charley's danger. My poor little Agnes writes only about Charley—naturally enough ; except that she adds some rather mournful words of longing for me. Arling is strange to her, and she does not like to call Mrs. Penryhn 'grandmamma,' and yet does not know what else to say, and so keeps out of her way ; and this she is sure does not please Mrs. Penryhn. This first visit away from home is evidently a trial, but I am not sorry she should have it. If left to herself, she would be so morbidly shy, fastidious, and exclusive.

It is strange how little the Randolph worry presses upon my mind now that I am away from it. I think I see it in truer proportions. Ina need not have been intentionally deceitful in sending or receiving Mrs. Randolph's letters ; they could be nothing to her. She must have done it merely from good-nature. When I speak to her I shall not suppose it possible that there could have been any wish to deceive me about it. But I must and

shall give her a serious caution for the future. It is such a relief to me to have arrived at this conclusion. I wonder whether it is very selfish in me to care so much about Ina's small share in the matter and so little about Mrs. Randolph's large one. Yet I do wish Mrs. Bradshaw would write.

December 18.—Charley and I have had a long talk this morning; he is well enough to enjoy it. His heart is set upon being with his sisters and Hugh at Arling on Christmas-day; but I don't think it is possible. It will be a sore disappointment to myself, also, I tell him, so we must mutually keep up each other's spirits. If it were summer the journey might be practicable, for the distance is not very great, only an hour and a half by railway. But in the depth of winter, with the risk there must be of taking cold, I am afraid it will be impossible to obtain the doctor's permission. I tried to divert his mind by making him tell me all about his school occupation and his companions. It is singular how very little one can get out of boys upon these subjects, with all one's efforts. The chief thing I gathered from Charley this morning was, that he has a great friend, Frank Neville—a 'jolly good fellow,' as he calls him—a boy rather older than himself. The relations live in the north. I say relations, because Frank Neville is an orphan, and resides with an old uncle, who seems to be a kind of father to all the nephews in the family; at least—as Charley tells me, in his quaint way—he is not married, only as good as married, because his nephews are just like sons. I asked if Frank was the eldest. 'Oh, no!' was the answer, 'there are two or three others—cousins and brothers. Frank is going to work hard, and be a barrister; for old Mr. Neville says they must all work, because he can't leave them any money, but only give them a good education. There is another uncle, though, who has a good fortune, but he

does not do anything for his nephews,—only one of them will probably have his money when he dies.’

All this was not very clear to me, I confess, but I listened and took an interest in it, because it is chiefly through such means that I hope to keep up an influence over my boy. If Frank Neville should really prove a good friend, I mean to ask him to Dernham some day. I must inquire of Mr. Pierce about him.

It has rather troubled me that I have not said more to Charley about his illness, and danger, and recovery : but I find it so very difficult to introduce the subject. Boys of his age are, I fancy, very shy of allusions to personal feelings, especially as regards religion. I can talk to girls without difficulty. Generally speaking, I know, or fancy I know, just what will touch them ; but a boy’s mind is an unknown land to me, and I explore it with great self-distrust. Then, too, Charley has no idea how ill he has been, and I shall scarcely make him understand, much less feel it. The first night that he was at all conscious, I asked if I should say aloud the prayers which he had not strength to repeat himself ; and then I added a few words of thankfulness, which, I think, went home to his heart,—because he whispered to me afterwards, that I had said what he wished to say. But I could not talk to him then, and now, when he is more able to listen, life, in its usual form, seems creeping round me again. I must make the effort, though.

CHAPTER XXIV.

December 19.—I did manage to say something to Charley last night;—very little—not, I am sure, what a great many people would think right or sufficient; but still, it was something, and so I hope and pray that God's blessing may go with it. We were speaking of recollecting pleasant things; Charley said, that if he could only spend Christmas-day at Arling, with the others, he should look back upon his illness as pleasant, because it had been so nice having me all to himself.

I replied, that, after the first terrible anxiety, it had been pleasant to me, because I liked to be with him; but the first part of the time was so dreadful I did not think I could bear to look back upon it, except as Bishop Wilson did upon his illnesses.

That rather caught his attention, and he asked 'how that was?'

'He noted them in his journal,' I said, 'and then, as years went on, and the season came round, he renewed his thanks for having been spared.'

Charley looked very grave, and asked—'was I so very ill, mamma?'

'Yes,' I said; 'for two days I never thought that I should have you sitting by me, and talking to me now.'

'I did not know I was so ill,' he replied; 'it was all confused.'

'I don't think, as a rule, people do know when they are very ill,' I said; 'if they think at all, it is only how to get ease.'

‘I don’t remember what I thought of,’ said Charley; ‘it is just as if I had waked up from a dream.’

‘Only in this world instead of the next,’ was my answer. ‘There must be a vast number to whom death comes in the same way.’

I think he shrank rather from the word death,—it was too vivid and personal; but, without noticing this, I went on;—‘When one has once seen that kind of sudden illness, without any power of thought, it makes one wish very much to be prepared for it whilst one is in health. I remember,’ I added, ‘when I was a very little girl, younger than you, Charley, being frightened, by hearing of another little girl, who had been seized with a fever, something like yours, and was dead in a week,—and making such good resolutions in consequence.’

‘Was she good?’ he asked.

‘Yes, she was a very dear little thing, and I did not at all doubt she was happy. But I had played with her only the day before she was taken ill, and so it came home to me particularly. I recollect how careful I was to attend to my prayers, and how earnestly I asked God to help me to cure my temper, for I was very passionate.’

‘Were you?’ said Charley. ‘Mamma, I don’t think that could be. I think you were good always.’

‘Indeed, Charley, I was not. I was very naughty; but I am sure,’ I added (for I wanted to bring his mind to a definite point), ‘that God heard those prayers and helped me, for I don’t think I ever gave way to such terrible fits of temper after that time. You know God sends us warnings, and that was one. I have always been thankful that I listened to it.’

‘And was my illness a warning?’ said Charley, shyly.

‘I think it was,’ I said. ‘Perhaps you will see it more clearly by-and-by.’

‘But if it was a warning, what can I do about it?’ he

asked. I fancied there was something petulant in his tone, as if the idea was unwelcome, and brought before him duties which he did not know how to grasp.

‘Well,’ I said, ‘I always feel that the best way to take a warning is, to find out what it is sent for. Of course it is meant, in a general way, to bring us to live better lives; but I always like myself to think over in what particular way I can do better.’

‘I crib sometimes,’ said Charley. ‘The masters don’t like that.’

‘Because it is not quite honest, I suppose?’

‘But all the fellows do it,’ he continued.

‘I dare say they do,’ I said; ‘but I don’t quite see that that makes it right?’

‘No,’—and he became thoughtful; ‘perhaps I shall try not to crib.’

‘As to trying not to crib,’ I said, ‘I suppose it is one of those things which one can make up one’s mind about, whether one will do it or not.’

‘’Twill be awfully hard not to do it,’ he said.

‘I can fancy that,’ I answered.

‘I should have got an imposition many a time if I had not cribbed,’ he continued.

‘Just as you got double lessons when I used to teach you,’ I said.

‘Ah, but mamma, you don’t know what awful bores impositions are. One does not get an ounce of play. It’s learn, learn, out of school and in school.’

‘Excellent discipline,’ I said, laughing; ‘but Charley, as to the matter of cribbing, isn’t it necessary just because you take what you call too many ounces of play, when you ought to be at work?’

‘Well, yes, I suppose so.’

‘And so, if the work was done, there would not be the need to crib, and be dishonourable?’

‘ Oh, but, mamma, that’s not understanding. The masters don’t think it exactly dishonourable.’

‘ But they don’t think it exactly right ?’

‘ Oh, no, not right—but not so very wrong.’

‘ Only, for you it is wrong—because it occurs to your mind as a thing to give up.’

‘ If I could.’

‘ Well,’ I said, ‘ I remember when I made that resolution about my temper, I said just the same,—“if I could ;” for I did not really think I should succeed. But I did, at least in a great degree, because I put the resolution into my prayers, and then, you see, God helped me, and so it became easy. I don’t know what else is to be done about this cribbing.’

‘ Oh, it’s not the cribbing so much. I could say I won’t do that, but then it’s necessary ;—I could not get on without it.’

‘ Then it must be the finishing work before you begin play, I suppose, which is the real difficulty.’

‘ Yes, just that. It’s so horrid, sticking to one’s desk when the other fellows are out at cricket. Mamma, they say I shall be the best bowler of the junior eleven soon. You must give me a new bat then.’

‘ Yes,’ I said, ‘ you shall have one ; only I should like to be told, at the same time, that you had given up cribbing.’

‘ Well ! yes—perhaps.’

‘ And then I should think that you had not only had a warning, but made use of it,’ I said. ‘ And, Charley, if the masters were pleased——’

He interrupted me. ‘ They would not be pleased. They couldn’t know anything about it—’

‘ Perhaps not ; but you know Charley, it is quite true that, though the masters might not know it, God would ; and there can be no doubt that He would be pleased. And I think,’ I added, ‘ that when you remember your

illness, and how He has spared you, you would wish to please Him.'

'A great many fellows don't trouble themselves about cribbing,' he persisted.

'And a great many people don't trouble themselves about lying and stealing,' I said. 'But, all the same, they will have to give account to God for it. It is not what we think of a thing ourselves which makes it right or wrong; and it is no light matter to go on doing anything which we have even a misgiving may be wrong.'

'Do you think cribbing so very wrong?' he said.

'Yes, I do think it so. It seems to me to be mean and dishonourable; and I should like to believe that you were very sorry for it, and not only for that, but for any other things which you know have not been right. When we have been ill and are getting well, and yet are obliged to lie quiet, we have time for thinking of these matters; and that must be one of the reasons why God gives us such times to ourselves.'

He became very thoughtful, and I ventured to add—
'You know, if you don't like to talk to me about the wrong things, yet you can own them in your prayers; for God will be sure to forgive them for our dear Lord's sake. And then, if you will ask Him to give you his Holy Spirit to help you, you will be able to make a new start, as it were, and go on trying to do all that He would wish, as you try to please me. Don't you think you can? You know it is more easy to please Him than it is to please a human friend, because He sees our wishes and efforts, and accepts them, even when we fail, so long as we go on bravely again.'

Charley looked up at me and smiled, as he said, in a low voice, 'I will try.'

And I kissed him, and changed the conversation.

What good I have done I can scarcely see. I dare say

people who understand boys' natures would have managed a great deal better; and there are many, I am quite aware, who would not allow that I have even attempted anything, because I did not speak seriously of heaven and hell, and try to rouse my boy's feelings. All I can say is, that I have said and done what was natural to me, and that, if I had attempted more, I should have been strained in manner and words, and in that way, I am certain, I should have done more harm than good. I often envy persons who can bring out all that they think and feel, without shyness or difficulty;—enthusiastic, impulsive people. Even if, now and then, they a little chill me, I always know that the fault is in myself; and I do most highly estimate the good they do. I believe we should all stand still without them. But yet I must take myself as I am, and do the best I can with my own characteristics. I never could quote texts—partly, perhaps, because I never learnt them when I was a child;—and when I feel anything very much, it is simply impossible to talk about it. If ever I try to do it, I have a sense of having been dishonourable to myself—having betrayed my own confidence. I don't say it is a well-founded feeling. I am very glad that all the world are not like me; but God understands; and I hope, if it were really necessary to talk more, He would enable me to do it without the sense of unreality.

Dec. 21.—Actually, we have permission to go! I cannot say how thankful I am; as much for Mrs. Pierce's sake as our own. We were greatly in the way. I wanted last week to move into a lodging, but she would not hear of it, and every day I was hoping that the weather might improve, and then Dr. Grant said we might be able, with great care, to remove Charley altogether. The wind changed yesterday afternoon, and to-day we have really a soft air; and, unless there should be another change

before to-morrow, we shall be prepared to start about twelve o'clock, and I hope we shall be at Arling by two.

So ungrateful are we ! After all my relief from anxiety, I yet feel a certain dread of this return to the lesser cares which, during the last three weeks, have been swallowed up in one great one. The letters from Arling have been satisfactory, and a few lines from Mrs. Bradshaw have brought nothing new or startling from Dernham. There is a lull just at present in Mrs. Randolph's pecuniary affairs; and Mrs. Bradshaw writes me word that she is able to see a good deal of her, and that she wants comfort especially now, because she has not even Victor to amuse her. He is gone to stay with an old uncle. It is his father's doing. I suppose he felt at last that the boy could not be left at Woodleigh any longer; but what the old uncle is going to do with him I am not informed. Mr. Anson, I am told, is to be at home at Christmas. I am hesitating as to whether I shall suggest any caution with regard to his joining the choir; but perhaps it is better not. If one whispers an idea, it is sure to get wind, and it may be all a fancy of mine. Anyhow, being away, it is scarcely my responsibility, and I cannot precisely answer for Mrs. Bradshaw's wisdom, if she supposed, from anything I said, that it was needful to be on the watch.

I have been packing, and taking care of Charley all day, and am miserably tired. But I like to note—I trust with true thankfulness—that this is the last evening of my stay at Clarendon House. I am vexed with myself, for not having made greater friends with Mrs. Pierce—good little woman as she is ! But I have had no time to discuss household cares with her, and they are her constant theme. We did, however, mourn over the price of beef this evening, and I think she has felt more at home with me ever since. I am sure I don't wonder at her having household cares :

thirty boys to look after continually, and her husband by no means strong. They have no children, which is a trial; and yet a comfort, so far as lessening her work is concerned. I asked her what she thought of Frank Neville, and she spoke very highly of him; so did Mr. Pierce, who is a still better authority.

CHAPTER XXV.

December 22. Arling.—Tired, bewildered, half happy, half unhappy, and yet, I hope, wholly thankful! The journey was easy. We wrapped Charley up in furs and cloaks, made him a sofa in the railway carriage with cushions, and in less than two hours we were at the Arling station. Mrs. Penryhn has only a little open carriage, so I had telegraphed for a fly to meet us. We were safely housed by half-past two o'clock; Charley really very little tired. The first meeting with the children was intense happiness. Since then, what have I felt? I shall know better to-morrow. Mrs. Penryhn is like her photograph, only, as usual, less stern; also taller, younger—a fine-looking, handsome woman. Her courtesies are unbounded; her attentions almost oppressive. My little pets were overjoyed to see me; but Agnes burst into tears at the sight of Charley's pale face. Cecil looked at me with eyes which seemed to have gained in depth of earnest expression since we parted, gave me a long kiss, and said only 'Dear mamma.' Ina did all that her grandmamma could have done in the way of attention, and said everything that she ought to say. Everyone so kind, so thoughtful—Charley better—Christmas all but here—and yet I am lonely! I will go to bed. I am overtired. Life will look different to-morrow.

December 23.—Yes, life does look different. This has been a day of experiments. Mrs. Penryhn and I have been trying how we shall like each other. I think I know: but we stand in a false relation. I will do my

utmost to be unprejudiced. Arling is a house of moderate size, red brick with stone mullions, standing very near the road, but screened from it by a thick plantation. On the other side there is a pretty pleasure-ground, kept in excellent order, and beyond are some park-like fields. The view extends over Lord Worthington's woods to a range of downs—blue and distant. To the left the village and the Church tower form a foreground. In the inside the rooms are square, panelled, old-fashioned, but comfortable. There is nothing to describe. It is an average specimen of an English—not country house, but house in the country. Ina is the young lady of the house. There lies, I suspect, partly, the secret of her own satisfaction and her grandmother's influence. Very natural. Why should I complain? I spoke to her to-day of Mrs. Randolph and the letter—I felt I must have that trouble off my mind. The answer was simple: 'Yes, she had enclosed a note for Mrs. Randolph in one of her own to her grandmamma, and had forwarded the answer.' There did not appear to be the least idea that she had done anything amiss. I said, 'Why did you not tell me?'

'Oh, mamma, such a trifle!'—and there was a look of wonder, which seemed to say: 'Are you suspicious?'

I begged she would not do it again.

'Oh! certainly not, if you object; only there may be a difficulty if grandmamma should wish me to do it.'

'But it need not be unknown to me,' I said.

Ina was silent.

'Not unknown to me, dear child,' I repeated—'your grandmamma could not wish it to be that.'

But I could get no reply; and all I ventured to say was, 'I am sure, dear Ina, I may depend upon you, for indeed I have good reason for what I say.'

This was about an hour before luncheon. The con-

versation passed in my bed-room. I went downstairs and found Mrs. Penryhn in the drawing-room, alone. I had not made up my mind what to do or say; I trusted it would be pointed out to me.

Mrs. Penryhn was knitting a shawl for a bazaar. We both said it was very cold, and then I took out my work; and Mrs. Penryhn gave me a footstool, and begged me to draw my chair nearer the fire, and asked what I was doing. I lingered out the preliminaries. I dreaded coming to the discussion of the children; but I knew it was inevitable.

Mrs. Penryhn began—‘How much better Ina is looking since she has been here! Don’t you think so?’

‘She is looking very well,’ I said.

‘Yes, remarkably well now; but she struck me as very pale when she first came from Dernham.’

‘Did she? I did not remark it when I left her.’

‘Very likely; you would not, living with her. But Ina is delicate, and requires a great deal of care.’

‘I have sometimes doubted,’ I said, ‘whether she is as delicate as Cecil, though she looks more so.’

‘Poor dears!’ and Mrs. Penrhyn heaved a deep sigh.

‘They inherit delicacy, both of them, and the sea-side has always been trying to them.’

‘Bathing suits them,’ I said.

‘Possibly; but only for a short time. They require a bracing land air. Our down country is just the thing for them. They both stoop more than they did; I suppose from weakness.’

I would not contradict Mrs. Penrhyn, for it would only have irritated her. And really, as regards stooping, my conscience is quite easy, for it was only the other day that Mrs. Bradshaw was saying how much improved they were.

‘I dare say,’ continued Mrs. Penrhyn, ‘that losing the

discipline of school may have somewhat to do with it. It is so requisite for girls of their age to have a constant steady control over them in such matters.'

'Perhaps it is more difficult to exercise the care at home,' I said; 'but then, on the other hand, they gain by the absence of schoolgirl stiffness. There is a peculiar swing—especially to be remarked in these crinoline days—which I constantly notice in girls who have been drilled into what is considered "fashionable deportment."'

'I thought Ina would have been graceful at one time,' said Mrs. Penrhyn, as she worked her knitting-needles very fast.

'I think she will be,' I said; 'her's is just an awkward age.'

'And therefore an important one,' was the reply. 'Her governess, Mrs. Harrison, I know, looked forward to her being quite the ornament of the school.'

'I would rather see her the ornament of a drawing-room,' I said, laughing, 'if it is necessary for her to be the ornament of anything.'

'I don't know what you mean by necessary,' observed Mrs. Penryhn. 'If girls are to enter into society, it must be necessary that they should be educated so as to make a good appearance in it.'

'Certainly,' I said; 'or rather, perhaps, it is necessary that they should not make a bad one.'

'I can't understand such nice distinctions,' replied Mrs. Penrhyn, coldly; and then there was a silence, and we both worked diligently.

Presently I said,—'Shall we have the pleasure of seeing Mrs. Huddersfield to-day? Cecil told me, she thought that most probably she would drive over.'

'She talked of coming; but it is so cold, I am not sure that she will venture out. You have never seen her, I think?'

‘No,’ I said. ‘I have never had the pleasure.’

‘Such a devoted mother she is! And her children are so admirably brought up. Geoffrey, the eldest, will make a distinguished man some day, there is no doubt; and the girls are very clever, though not equal to their mother. Maria, you know, was the gem of my family in talent, as my poor Katharine was in beauty.’

‘I had understood,’ I said, ‘from Ina, that her aunt Katharine was very pretty.’

‘Lovely; really lovely. But you must have seen her miniature; Julia Randolph has it, and I know she meant to show it to you.’

‘Mrs. Randolph did show it,’ I said. ‘I thought the features like Ina’s.’

‘Yes, somewhat; but not the expression. We used to say that the two friends, Julia and Katharine, were alike in that respect,—so brilliant and speaking,—though Julia Randolph can’t pretend to any regularity of feature.’

‘No,’ I said; ‘she is simply an attractive person.’

‘You think her attractive, do you?’ and Mrs. Penryhn’s face brightened. ‘Ina told me that you could not bear her, and I was sorry that a friend with whom we have so many affectionate associations should meet with a prejudiced reception.’

‘Really,’ I said, and I am afraid my tone was a little sharp, ‘I was not aware that I was prejudiced. I have merely judged Mrs. Randolph from what I have seen and heard.’

Mrs. Penryhn caught up the last word. ‘Oh, if you judge according to what you hear, of course everything is decided beforehand; and that, I confess, is what I call prejudice.’

‘But,’ I said, ‘if one may not form an opinion according to what one sees and hears, what is to be done? In Mrs. Randolph’s case——’

‘Forgive me; I don’t want to discuss Mrs. Randolph. I have long known how harsh the world is to her, and how cruelly she has been treated, and the subject is a painful one. I should not have alluded to it, but with the hope that you might have been above listening to gossip.’

I was sorely tempted to take the matter into my own hands, and say out all I thought about it. But as a guest in Mrs. Penryhn’s house, on this, the first day of my visit, it would have been impossible to risk a quarrel; and I saw, by her eager manner and heightened colour, that one was impending. I thought of every possible subject that might turn the conversation into a safe channel, but my mind seemed a blank. Just then, to my great relief, Hugh came in from his walk, and Mrs. Penryhn immediately began petting him, taking him, indeed, entirely out of my hands; but I was only too thankful for anything which might divert the current of her ideas. Luncheon was announced just as the children were going off to the nursery, and almost at the same moment a tramp of horses’ feet, loud exclamations, and chattering voices announced an arrival—the Huddersfields, I supposed, for no one else could be so much at home.

They came trooping into the drawing-room—Mrs. Huddersfield, Geoffrey, Celia, and Anastasia;—the three young people having lately come from school.

I felt rather like a child who has a secret consciousness of being in disgrace, as Mrs. Penryhn introduced them with great formality. We made little bows, and half put out our hands, and paused, and advanced them a few inches farther, and at last arrived at a hesitating touch—I cannot call it shake. And then we looked at each other, and said, how cold it was. Beyond that, as regards my share in the conversation, I have nothing to record. It was a family party, and

family talk, and I am not one of the family. I was ignored except by looks. Anastasia, I am sure, could give a perfect description of my dress, to the smallest detail. Her eyes went up and down, taking in trimming, collar, brooch, chain, rings;—I felt it all,—while she lolled in an easy attitude in an arm-chair, waiting till her mamma and grandmamma had finished their mutual inquiries about health. When these were concluded, she said shortly, ‘Grandmamma, I shall go upstairs, and find Ina and Cecil,’ and ran out of the room. Celia, in the meanwhile, had been whispering with Geoffrey, and when Anastasia was gone, they came forward to their mother, begging that she would decide some dispute as to which of the sisters was to ride the grey pony home. Mrs. Huddersfield cut them short with—‘Don’t be troublesome, my dears,’ spoken in a very authoritative tone; and they departed.

Luncheon was announced; but the family talk still continued. I was by this time so uncomfortable, sitting by and hearing a conversation going on in which it was impossible for me to take any part, that I also made an excuse to move, and said, I was afraid that Ina and Cecil might not know that luncheon was ready; I would go and look for them.

‘Oh! thank you, but they know quite well: they are only unpunctual,’ said Mrs. Penryhn.

To which Mrs. Huddersfield added—‘Yes, that is what they always are; but they must learn differently, if they are to get through life comfortably.’

So again I was rebuked; and we went into luncheon. And then I took courage, and thought that, as the world did not choose to amuse me, I would amuse myself; and I watched, and listened, and said very little, and came to my own conclusions; in which I decided that Mrs. Huddersfield is a strong-minded, energetic, clever woman,

gifted by nature with excellent qualities, which have been marred by her mother's home flattery; that Geoffrey is an uncouth genius; and that Celia and Anastasia are unquestionably schoolgirlish—a description which includes all that is most displeasing in a girl's outward nature, though it by no means involves any hopeless wickedness within. Giggling, whispering, glancing at each other across the table, uttering little jokes which no one but themselves understood! I sat by, in a state of nervous irritation, indescribable; and then I looked at Ina and Cecil, and saw a few schoolgirl symptoms in them; just the small things which showed what, without careful training, they might be—more, though, in Ina than Cecil,—because I am nearly sure Cecil understood my feelings. I saw her watching me rather anxiously, and drawing back occasionally; and she took particular care of Agnes, who, with her little quiet, demure face, looked on and listened, and, I suspect, shared very much my sensations, though she would not have known how to account for them.

The Huddersfield party did not stay late, as some of them had to walk home. We are to meet again on Christmas-day, when they are all to dine here. Mrs. Huddersfield took care to impress upon me that she had come over to-day on purpose to see me, and I was obliged to her for the announcement, as otherwise I should certainly not have suspected it—she took so little notice of me. But I really must not judge all these people by their disagreeable manners. The sterling kindness ought to counterbalance such things; and when I think of Mrs. Penryhn's receiving such a number of us into her home, and taking the trouble she does, I am ashamed of being so ungrateful. To-morrow aunt Bessie comes back, and then, perhaps, things may be more comfortable, for everyone says she is a remarkably amiable person. I used to de-

test that word 'amiable' as a child, and think it always implied weakness; but a little experience of domineering dispositions, and fidgety tempers, makes one look upon it as a priceless treasure.

Christmas-day.—This is not a journal of what people call spiritual experiences; I never could keep *that*. It always seems to me that my best feelings are like the lovely figure of a young girl I once heard of, as having been discovered in a cave in Greece. It had been buried for centuries, and whilst it lay hidden, and no eye but that of God could look upon it, it retained all its freshness and grace; but no sooner was it exposed to the outward air, and the curious gaze of man, than it crumbled to dust. To-day has not been without comfort, and help, and happiness,—very much the contrary; but I must tell of all that in my prayers. There is only One who can understand; only One, also, who knows how, on these anniversaries, thought travels back to the past,—the happy days which one would not retrace, the pleasures which one would never desire to recall, the loved ones whom one would not dare to bring back to earth; the *all* which memory keeps as the material with which hope is to be nourished. If this life has once been so glad, what may not life in Heaven be?

Christmas-day must be Christmas-day always, under all circumstances, wherever one is. But I would fain not pass another at Arling, except that the children have been very happy, and, I think, Mrs. Penryhn has been pleased. Aunt Bessie returned last evening, about six o'clock, and certainly I have every reason to be grateful for that. She is a pleasant, brisk, neat-looking, fair-haired, blue-eyed little woman, of about three-and-thirty; the factotum of the home, at every one's beck and call, never put out, never hurried; the one so-called stupid member of a clever family, but the one without whom it

would seem that no one could get on comfortably. She is shy with me. Ina tells me she is afraid of me, because she has been told that I am wonderfully clever. I groaned inwardly at the idea, and said nothing. One can no more make a public confession of one's ignorance, than one can of one's sins; and so the world must just think what it likes. But I can't help laughing to myself sometimes, when I hear of the astounding reputation which I have unconsciously acquired; and sometimes I am more inclined to cry. Aunt Bessie, however, made me laugh; she approached me with such evident deference and timidity, and, I suspect, rather irritated Mrs. Penryhn in consequence. However, before the evening was over, we made excellent friends, and to-day she has really been invaluable to me. She would scarcely believe it herself, but I have actually a sense of protection when she is near; I feel so sure that everything she says will tend to put things on an easy, comfortable footing, and there is need for this, as regards myself. Then, too, she is so good, and simply religious. A kind of unformed religion I suspect hers is; I doubt if she would go through a thorough examination, even in the catechism, and I am quite sure she would never compete with Mrs. Bradshaw in the Thirty-nine Articles; but her sincerity is read in every word and action; more especially in church. She did me much more good than the sermon, which struck me as being too learned for the congregation, and rather of a piece with the whole service; reading, singing, responses, all were cold. I missed Mr. L'Estrange's quaint earnestness. The church is to be restored,—not before it needs it. We sat in the Arling pew, comfortably curtained, and screened from the prying eyes of the congregation. I wished I had not had Mrs. Penryhn's eyes directed to me the whole time, for in a square seat I could not help being opposite to her; but

Agnes was there also, and her little innocent, devotional face reproved me for all wandering, irritable thoughts. It so plainly said—‘this is Christmas-day, and we are all to be happy and love each other.’

After luncheon, as there was no afternoon service, I took the three elder girls for a walk. We went across the fields to the entrance of Lord Worthington’s woods. It was frosty, clear, and very lovely, and there was a fresh holiday feeling in the air, a quietness almost like Sunday, specially soothing to me in connection with the morning service. A noisy Christmas-day—though very natural where there are young people—always rather jars upon me. I said to the two girls, that I hoped it was the last Christmas Communion I should have without them, and then we went on to talk a little of the Confirmation; and from that we reached their cousins, the Huddersfields, who are also to be confirmed. Ina, I saw, was very desirous to know what I thought of them; but I would give no opinion, only I said I could tell they were schoolgirls, by their way of muttering and whispering, and making signs, and glancing at each other across the dinner table. Ina said directly, ‘Oh, then, you don’t like them,’ and I could only reply, ‘I don’t know enough of them to say that. I only know that they are schoolgirlish.’ ‘Yes, they are that,’ said Ina assentingly. And Cecil added quickly: ‘Mamma, I muttered and glanced too.’

I did not dwell upon the subject, but I was glad to have the opportunity of giving them an idea that I was not quite satisfied with the way they behaved yesterday. People think so little of these things generally, and fancy that girls will ‘come all right,’ as they say, through the influence of society. But the fact is, that though society may give them a kind of a French varnish, which satisfies a superficial observer, there is nothing but careful attention, when very young, which will render them thoroughly

well-bred; at least, till they have acquired that true Christian feeling which involves good breeding in its highest sense. There are so many persons who just fall short of what one feels to be perfect refinement, and good taste, and yet who cannot be stigmatised as vulgar. They are only common, and the *commonness* betrays itself in some small matters, which no one, probably, took the trouble to correct when they were children.

This is just what I suspect will be the case with the children's cousins. Their sharp-speaking, shrewd, and so-called sensible mother has evidently not thought it worth while to correct tone, and gesture, and accent; or probably she has taken it for granted that all such things will be attended to at school. Ina tells me her cousins were much worse when they were ten years old, and that I can quite imagine; for at that age people allow children to acquire a *brusquerie* of manner, which afterwards they find intolerable, and which, probably, is never entirely overcome.

Oh dear! This is all very wise, on my part. I don't know why I should have written it, except that Celia and Stasey, as Anastasia is called, fretted my nerves all the evening. We found them arrived when we returned from our walk, and then Ina and Cecil were obliged to devote themselves to them. I had a quiet hour with Agnes and the two little ones, in my own room before the late dinner, and went downstairs only just in time to be introduced to Mr. Huddersfield, who is emphatically Geoffrey's father. The likeness between the two is absurd—short, stooping, near-sighted, very absent in manner, rather *unkempt* and *uncanny* in look; both of them, as one cannot but think, live certainly not on earth, scarcely in heaven; but in some middle region of cloud and mist, where people content themselves with the things which have ceased to be, and the things which may never

be, and think nothing of the things which are. Yet I like Mr. Huddersfield; he is so simple, and so prettily obedient to his wife; and moreover he gave me such very amusing information about old Christmas traditions and practices still lingering in the north; diverging from them to the Scandinavian mythology, and not at all scandalised by my ignorance of the domestic history of Thor and Odin.

We had games for the children after tea. Characters came out amusingly. Mrs. Huddersfield managed; Mrs. Penryhn applauded; aunt Bessie glided about, doing the disagreeables for every one. Mr. Huddersfield meditated in a corner; Geoffrey did just what he ought not, and said just what he ought, and was the butt of the party, half quizzed, half admired; Celia and Stasey were noisy, but Celia was very good-natured; Ina was gracious and sweet, as the young lady of the house should be; Cecil unselfish and merry, and I think wishing to please me by being quiet; Agnes, a little too shy and timid to satisfy anyone but a mother. My inclination was, to sit up in a corner, and look on, and say nothing; but of course that would not have been allowable, so I went about, doing what little I could, in a humble way, to second Mrs. Huddersfield's exertions; and I hope I managed to win her heart a little, for she thanked me, in taking leave, for helping to make the young things happy; which was rather condescending, considering our relative positions, but I took it as it was meant, and was properly gratified.

As she was going away, I heard her say to Mrs. Penryhn, 'Did your letter go this afternoon?' 'Yes,' was the reply; 'and I named the 2nd.' 'And what have you done about Marietta?' The answer to that query was inaudible. But the question has set me thinking.

CHAPTER XXVI.

December 26.—Some one said to me once—*à propos* to a gentleman who never took the trouble to answer his letters—that he (the gentleman) acted upon the principle that, if you only wait long enough, letters will answer themselves. Whatever may be the case with letters, the trust is certainly often justified with regard to matters of curiosity. I had a letter from Mrs. Bradshaw this morning, which tells me all I wanted to know, and rather more, in reference to the short conversation between Mrs. Huddersfield and her mother.

‘Beechwood, December 24.

‘My dear Mrs. Anstruther: (I don’t call you dear friend yet, because I doubt if you have yet reached the friendship station. When you have, send me word, and I will reciprocate.)

‘This comes, giving you notice—as the people in my village used to say when I was young—that I am sorely put out, and in a very un-Christian frame of mind. Why will people meddle with what does not concern them?—which means, Why does Mrs. Penryhn ask Julia Randolph to Arling? Give my best wishes to her (wishes for discretion and common sense), and tell her that she has spoilt the very best plan for saving a poor weak fool from destruction which could possibly have been concocted; and that Marietta, and the rector, and myself shall owe her a grudge for it to our dying day. You have been gone, how long? Not a month; and in that time we three had worked marvels. I don’t quite know what part the rector has taken, but he has been always at Woodleigh helping

Marietta, so we reckon him a member of the Triumvirate. The German Baron and his wife are gone—fled on the wings of love, or despair, or shame, or, at any rate, on some wings or other, to *Vaterland*: to whose kind protection I heartily commend them. No doubt, they will turn up at Homburg or Baden. My dear, they were regular scamps, though he is a half-brother of Lady Chase's. It was she who introduced them at Woodleigh. Strictly speaking, they are friends of the police—that is to say, the police would have no occupation without them, or those like them. Suddenly, one morning they decamped. Ponds were searched, telegrams despatched, horses sent scouring over the country. (I give you the village reports—truth magnified by a mental Lord Rosse's telescope.) Certainly there was some story against the Baron, which brought down a London detective, who frightened Mrs. Randolph into hysterics, and Marietta into cold dignity, which, but for the emergencies of the moment, might have ended in hot fever. They sent for me. Mrs. Randolph would see no one else. I found that, as usual, she had been the veriest idiot under the sun—trusting these people, treating them *en grande Princesse*, and, worse than all, gambling. Happily, she has not paid all her gambling debts, and I don't intend she shall, for she has unquestionably been cheated; but her affairs are in an inextricable mess. She was in abject misery and humiliation—for the first time, I do believe, realising, in a faint degree, the consequences of her own wilfulness. Of course one of the London police having been sent down to look after her intimate friends has made her more than ever the talk of the neighbourhood; and even her maid has ventured to hint some very disagreeable truths. I said plainly, there was but one thing left for her,—reconciliation with her husband, including an acknowledgment of having behaved badly, and pro-

mises of amendment for the future. She was proud as Lucifer. Marietta and I were obliged to go down on our mental knees, to entreat her to send for him and tell him all. "She would think—she would see—the trades-people would wait—she would consult,"—she was going to say,—Lady Chase; but then Marietta stood up, and said grandly and authoritatively, "Aunt Julia, the day that you consult Lady Chase, I leave your house." And the poor weak thing burst into tears, and gave in, for Marietta is the one creature on earth whom she thoroughly trusts and loves. And so we thought it was all right, and were be-praising each other as the cleverest friends under the sun; and Mr. Randolph had actually been written to by his wife (a formal letter I am afraid it was, but still leading the way to something better), when, before an answer could be received, comes an invitation to Arling, and the whole face of affairs is changed. This poor woman, who is the most cowardly of all moral cowards, and has been dreading an interview with her husband as she would death, suddenly declares that it will be much better for her to be away, and leave Marietta to explain everything. A meeting with herself will only bring recriminations and fresh quarrels. He cannot possibly object to her being at Arling; it is the best place she can go to. She will promise to do all he wishes, and agree to anything he may propose about Victor, who has been a great bone of contention between them. In fact, she will be supremely obedient, only she can't meet him; and, therefore, nothing could be more opportune, more Providential, than the invitation to Arling. (A little blasphemous that last assertion, connecting self-will with Providence! But I can't blame her, for I have often done the same thing myself.) The upshot of it all is, that, on January 2nd, Julia Randolph is to favour you with her presence at Arling; and on the 3rd Mr. Randolph is

to appear at Woodleigh, to find his wife flown, Marietta domiciled with me (the Arling invitation has not been extended to her), and a host of claimants for unpaid bills for housekeeping expenses, thrusting themselves upon him, and clamorous for attention.

‘It really is madness. The rector, and Marietta, and I, have reasoned and argued, scolded and entreated, but all to no purpose. People say nothing is more cruel than fear; I say nothing is more insane. Mr. Randolph is the last man to be trifled with. His curses (of course I use the word metaphorically) are not loud, but deep. What he will do I can’t pretend to say, but it will be a worse matter even than if his wife had received Lady Chase at Woodleigh. You will ask, perhaps, Why don’t we write and give him notice—tell him to delay till the Arling visit is over? My dear, there is one rule of wisdom, which admits of no exception: never interfere between husband and wife. We have gone as far as we dared, in bringing matters, as we hoped, to the point of confession and humility; we can go no farther. If Julia Randolph won’t meet her husband, she won’t, and she must take the consequence. I know better than she does, I suspect, what the Arling visit portends. She is a woman who will no more face her own intentions than she will those of other people. But Woodleigh will never be her home again. Marietta is behaving as only Marietta could. That passionate Italian feeling, when controlled by English principle and good sense, makes a wonderful character. She has seen the Westford tradespeople herself, told them precisely how matters stand, answered for Mr. Randolph’s coming to Woodleigh to settle affairs, given them fair notice that her aunt may be away; in fact, taken the whole of the affair into her own hands, as if she were the person responsible for everything. The rector and I wished to help her; but she said “No. She knew her

uncle too well. He would be indignant if other persons' names were in any way mixed up with his private concerns, and she would take all the responsibility upon herself." So, there she is, working like a slave, for this unfortunate woman, who is too foolish to raise a finger to help herself, and is persisting in the very course which will destroy all that Marietta is labouring for. There is no one really able to comfort or support Marietta except——. I can't talk good to you; it would be like preaching to the Archbishop of Canterbury; but it is a particular satisfaction to me just now to think that we are all travelling to another world, where there will be no Lady Chases or German barons; or where—if we are to meet them—they will certainly be changed.

'Of course, through all this I hate and despise Julia Randolph, and shall have nothing more to say to her! Alas! must I speak truth? I can't hate. I am not up in the clouds enough myself to despise, and the weaker she is the more I pity her. As for casting her off, the separation, whenever it comes, will be her work, not mine.

'I have said nothing about the disgust you will feel. Write it out to me, and I will give you full sympathy. If it were my case, I should pack up my clothes, and be off by the next train. But I have no space to express and explain, so I must give you a love lozenge—a concentrated essence. My love to your girls, and kisses to the little dots.

'Yours, in all sincerity, and more affection than you will be induced to believe,

'CHARLOTTE BRADSHAW.'

'P.S.—A *multum in parvo* of Dernham news, or you will drop the correspondence!

'We sang beautifully on Christmas-day. Sir John looked out from behind the red curtain, and I am sure he

longed to say "bravo!" Don't go away, and declare he did! Mr. Anson is returned. If I were not far above spreading scandal, I should say that he and the rector would infallibly have a duel soon—all for love of the fair Marietta. Poor dear rector! I am convinced he spends half-an-hour every morning in pulling out his grey hairs! Lydia Harcourt wears a dark grey merino, mourning for her buried hopes. Lady Anson looks unkindly at me, but I mean to tell her it is all your doing. Actually, I forgot!—I am converted from my wilful and wicked ways, and have taken to "references." The rector's face of alarmed gratification, when I humbly begged permission to have your class in the Sunday-school, would have made a picture for ——! Fill in the blank; you know more about artists than I do.'

Food for thought, indeed, there is in this communication, and food for anger too. Mrs. Penryhn has treated me very badly. When I was talking to her the other day, she ought to have told me that Mrs. Randolph was coming, even if she had not mentioned it before. And I have a suspicion—a very unpleasant one—that Ina has known of the invitation from the beginning, and has been told not to tell me. If it should be so—but I won't forestall worries—the question is, what am I to do—or rather, can I do anything? If Mrs. Penryhn does not choose to give me the ordinary confidence which I have a right to expect as the children's mother, and her guest, can I resent it? Am I bound to do so?

I have a strong persuasion that if people don't keep their own place, and stand up for what is their due, they bring themselves into difficulty; and I can plainly see the ill effect of this setting-me-aside process upon Ina's mind; how it tends to exalt her position in the family, and to make her look upon me as a person apart from it. And I might very fairly remonstrate with Mrs. Penryhn—at

least, show her that I was displeased. But I question much, whether I should do any good. If a neglect or rudeness—be it small or great—cannot be resented effectually, I suppose it is better to let it pass unnoticed. And, after all, the important point is, not how Mrs. Penryhn acts or feels towards me, but what effect her conduct and Mrs. Randolph's coming will have upon Ina.

With regard to this, I cannot say how powerless I feel. The little influence which I thought I had gained at home is entirely neutralised here. There are many things which Mrs. Penryhn, as the mistress of the house, must decide; and as, for years, the children were accustomed to make her their ultimate referee in all things, it is evident that, whilst with her, she must be first. I think I will own that necessity, and submit to it. It is in vain to fight against the inevitable. Mrs. Randolph shall come or go, without any remark from me. So also I will not inquire whether Ina knew of the visit and kept it from me. Ignorance is as often wisdom as it is bliss. I am not required to stand upon my right if I am not supposed to be aware that any right has been infringed; and if Ina were to tell me—as no doubt she would—that her grandmamma had forbidden her to mention that Mrs. Randolph was expected, I could say nothing—I could only look displeased, and so give the idea that I was jealous. No!—endurance must be my motto for the present. I shall try, though indirectly, to keep my hold upon the children. I have already settled that they are to read with me every day, as a preparation for their Confirmation. That will give me at least an hour with them alone, and the opportunity of free conversation. As to Mrs. Randolph, I won't think about her. It is no use. I can make no resolutions as to what I will or will not do. I must simply take each day as it comes, and trust that I shall be guided aright; but I have a fretted, uneasy

feeling at my heart, which will make me very indifferent company in this Christmas party, unless I strive against it. After all, perhaps, in thus fighting against circumstances, I am fighting against God's will;—fancying that I could keep the children more free from harm than He can. And what is harm? Is any event evil apart from its results? And how can we judge of these results, until we see the end? The sum total of the various influences of life will be reckoned in another state of existence; and perhaps many things which now we are tempted to put to the account of evil, will then be found to have swelled the balance of good!

I am glad, and yet sorry, that Mrs. Bradshaw is alive to Mr. Anson's *penchant* for Marietta; glad, because she will be watchful over it; sorry, because it makes the idea more of a reality, and I foresee trouble from it. As to the rector, I dislike very much bringing in his name. If that kind of joke is once set on foot, it will reach his ears, and prevent him from helping Marietta as he does now. No doubt he likes to have her all to himself, it is an elderly bachelor's privilege; and no doubt he sees, just as I do, how unwelcome young Anson's fancy will be to the family, and so does not desire to have Marietta exposed to the risk of rejection by them; but as for anything else, it is absurd; there is such a difference of age, and—I don't exactly know what—but there are some things which one feels to be not so much improbable as impossible. Mrs. Bradshaw is very good about my Sunday class, but I shall be rather afraid to succeed her; she will manage to make the lesson so much more amusing than I can, that my teaching will be quite dull in comparison.

CHAPTER XXVII.

December 29.—Such a curious conversation I had this morning, with Miss Penryhn—Bessie, as she begs me to call her. In her simple way, she gave me a clear, and, upon the whole, a very shrewd insight into the family's politics. She respects her mother, because she is her mother; and I am sure she is not in the least aware that there would be no respect if Mrs. Penryhn were not her mother, but the truth shows itself involuntarily. We were talking of the party which is to be given on the 3rd. Bessie was full of anxiety, lest it should not go off well. She said it was doubtful whether her sister Maria (Mrs. Huddersfield) would be able to help her in the arrangements; and, if so, what should she do?

I offered my services, if I could be of any use, and Bessie thanked me cordially, but hesitatingly, and said: 'If it were necessary,—I was so kind,—but it might not be necessary; she would do the best she could.'

I did not like to press the point, thinking I might be interfering, and I suppose something in the expression of my face made Bessie think I was annoyed, though I really scarcely felt so, for she said directly: 'If Maria can be brought round, we shall do very well; she always does everything better than anyone else.'

'I can fancy,' I said, 'that Mrs. Huddersfield would manage a party well: she would be so energetic.'

'Yes, she is very energetic,' said Bessie, 'but'—and a very pretty arch smile brightened up her good-tempered

face—‘she makes me feel a little out of breath; I am so slow, I can never catch up with her.’

‘Then you will have to begin your work so many days earlier, if you are not to have her help,’ I said.

‘It is not so much the preparation, I can do that. I have settled about the supper, and I have nearly arranged with my mother about the musicians,—but it is the evening itself. When Maria chooses, she can make an evening go so pleasantly.’

‘Oh!’ I said, ‘you may be sure she will do all that is required, when the evening comes. I dare say now she has a good deal to think of at home, and can’t throw her mind into anything beyond the present.’

‘Well, yes, that may be, but Maria likes to have everything her own way.’

‘Persons who manage well usually do,’ I said.

‘Very true; yes, very true;—but then, you see, my mother likes to have everything her own way too. They generally quite agree: I don’t mean at all to say that they don’t now; only, if Maria should not quite like things when the evening comes, we shall be very dull.’

‘I see, you like to forestall evil, Bessie,’ was my reply, and I put my hand rather caressingly upon her shoulder.

She looked up at me suddenly, and I saw that the usually bright blue eyes had actually a weary, anxious cloud over them.

‘Perhaps I do,’ she said; ‘but I think I am tired this morning. I have been talking so much, and writing,—that makes me look at the dark side.’

‘And if the party should be dull,’ I continued, ‘it will not be a matter of very great consequence.’

‘Oh, it is not that alone; if my mother could be pleased,—and if Maria did not try,—I suppose, though, it is natural for all persons to wish to put their own children first.’

‘Is it a question between Mrs. Huddersfield’s children and mine, which makes the difficulty?’ I asked.

‘Yours? you mean Ina and Cecil?’—and Bessie paused and blushed painfully, feeling, I am sure, directly the words escaped her, that they must have jarred upon me.

‘Yes, Ina and Cecil,’ I said, without noticing her confusion. ‘Ina especially, for Cecil is such a child, and so willing to keep in the back ground, that I don’t think she could be made to compete with anyone.’

‘They would not compete, either of them, I know,’ replied Bessie. ‘I proposed speaking to Ina, but my mother would not hear of it. I am quite sure, though, Ina would not mind Celia’s opening the ball, as they call it.’

I burst into a fit of laughter. I really could not help it. ‘You don’t mean to say, my dear Bessie,’ I exclaimed, ‘that such a point as that makes any disagreement between your mother and Mrs. Huddersfield? Why, it is to be a mere children’s party. They will all dance together.’

‘So I said,’ continued Bessie; ‘but, you see, it must be settled, because young Lord Hopeton—Lord Worthington’s son, is coming, and, of course, he must dance first with the young lady of the house; and the difficulty is, to decide whether that ought to be Ina or Celia. My mother says Ina used to live here, and ought to be looked upon as belonging to us; and Maria says that Ina has been taken away, and has gone into another family: please don’t mind my saying so; and that Celia who is living so near, and stands just in the same relationship, has the better claim.’

‘Might not the question be decided by age?’ I suggested.

‘I proposed that. I proposed everything,’ said Bessie with a sigh, ‘but nothing would do. I reminded my

mother that my poor dear sister Cecilia was younger than Maria, and so her children should be considered second; and I said that I was certain you would not care; but that only made matters worse.'

This confession did not surprise me. Bessie is an excellent creature, but far too simple-minded to manage her fellow mortals by her knowledge of their weaknesses.

'If it were not Lord Hopeton it would signify less,' continued Bessie; 'but I know my mother does wish very much that Ina should dance first with him.'

'But Lord Hopeton is a mere boy,' I exclaimed, hastily.

'Yes, quite a boy, only seventeen; but, as my mother says, he will some day be a man; and, you see, the estates join, and old Lord Worthington is a very kind-hearted man. In fact, my mother has set her heart upon Lord Hopeton's dancing first with Ina.'

I bit my lips and said nothing. If I had spoken I am convinced that I should have uttered something very uncivil.

Bessie went on—'It seems to me so much better to let children be children, and to leave things more to chance. I don't mean really to chance, but to just what may happen. But my mother has always liked to arrange things beforehand.'

'Let Mrs. Penryhn settle this matter as she will,' I said, 'she will still have the satisfaction of knowing that one of her grandchildren was Lord Hopeton's partner.'

'You think it all nonsense; I know that by your tone,' said Bessie. 'My mother would think the same if it were anyone else; but she is so proud of Ina.'

'I wish she would be too proud to trouble herself about her, at least in this way,' I said. 'Bessie, dear, you must forgive me,—I have rather a strong prejudice against this kind of thing. I was brought up with it.'

When I was first—what is called—introduced into society, my mother would not have lifted her finger to win for me the attention of a Prince. She would have thought both herself and me lowered by it. I don't pretend to say that there was any special goodness in the feeling. My mother was human, and I dare say she cared for rank and wealth, though I never found out that she did; but certainly she never troubled me about them.'

I was afraid I had spoken too eagerly, for Bessie looked pained, and rather perplexed.

I tried to continue the subject in a lighter tone, and observed, that I supposed poor Lord Hopeton would be allowed to have a voice in the matter himself.

'I said that,' replied Bessie, 'but my mother and Maria both declared that it must be settled for him; he must be told what to do. And I suppose they are right.'

'Well!' I exclaimed, 'no doubt it will all turn out better than we anticipate, and as long as Ina and Celia don't trouble themselves about the matter, it will be of little consequence. And Bessie,' I added, 'I can understand somewhat of Mrs. Huddersfield's feeling, because I know I am always inclined to be a little jealous for Ina.'

'Can you understand? I am so glad. I don't like to think it wrong. And, you know, Maria's children are always put in the background when Ina is here. Ina is one of my mother's pets.'

'Mrs. Penryhn is remarkably devoted to her,' I said. 'I dare say it may partly arise from the remembrance of her mother.'

'Yes; everyone says Cecilia was idolised. I don't remember about it myself, because, you see, I am the youngest. But I was always told that Henry and she were the favourites.'

'And there has been such sorrow connected with them,' I said.

‘Terrible sorrow!’ murmured Bessie, and she paused, and then went on, ‘First, Sophy Stuart’s death, (she, you know, was Mrs. Randolph’s sister, and Henry was engaged to her,) and then Henry’s brain fever, and so much, much trouble. And at last, his going to Australia,—an exile for life, for he will never come back. He says he could not bear it.’

‘It must be an immense comfort to you,’ I said, ‘that he is married, and has a home in his strange land.’

‘Yes, and he is wonderfully improved,—quite a different person,—but yet—’ Bessie hesitated, and then, as with an intent to relieve herself of a burdensome thought, continued quickly, ‘It was not really a happy marriage, as far as my mother is concerned. She could never bear the Nevilles.’

‘Was Mrs. Henry Penryhn a Miss Neville?’ I inquired eagerly.

‘Yes, related to the Nevilles of Chilhurst—a Yorkshire family. One of them emigrated to Australia some years ago. That was how Henry met his wife. My mother had known the Nevilles as a child; she lived near them, and there was a quarrel between the two families. I never could quite make out what it arose from, but it was very bitter to her when poor dear Henry married a Neville.’

‘But it is so long ago, and absence and distance must have softened the feeling; and surely Mrs. Penryhn is grateful to the lady who has made such a good wife to her son.’

Bessie shook her head. ‘Ah! Mary (I may call you so, mayn’t I?), I don’t understand these feelings; but my mother never can change. And there is a fresh cause of offence now, because poor Henry’s eldest boy John, who was to have been sent to my mother when he came to England for education, has been placed with the Nevilles

instead, and my mother never has seen him ; and what is more, she won't inquire about him, or even bear to hear his name mentioned.'

'Most sad! most wonderful!' escaped my lips ; but I regretted it directly, for I saw that Bessie's conscience smote her for revealing her mother's failings.

'I suppose,' she said, 'people can't help the dispositions they are born with ; at least, if they can help them, somehow they don't.'

'I must tell Charley to be careful,' I said, 'for his great friend at school is one of the Nevilles. Mr. Pierce speaks very highly of him.'

'Oh yes, all the young people are excellent, very well educated, very clever. There are two families of cousins, who have been brought up by a bachelor uncle. John Penryhn could not have been in better hands, but it has made a great breach in the family ; and poor Henry is terribly cut up about it.'

'As well he may be,' I said. 'But I suppose he knew Mrs. Penryhn's feeling when he married.'

'No doubt ; but then, he thought time would soften it. But it is so difficult, so impossible, indeed, to make things better ; because there is nothing to take hold of, only dislike. My mother dislikes the Nevilles, and says she will have nothing to do with them.'

'And you don't at all know what John Penryhn is doing now?' I asked, with an uncomfortable interest in the question.

'I know nothing. Poor dear boy ! I often long to see him, or at least to write to him ; but it would not do. My mother would be very much annoyed. She had cause to be angry about his not coming to us. It was all but settled, and then the Nevilles interfered, and Susannah (that is my sister-in-law, Henry's wife) was very anxious he should go to her family, and so at last he went.'

‘Really,’ I said, ‘it appears to me to be one of those cases in which parents must judge best for themselves : and there is no gentleman here to take upon himself the responsibility of a boy’s management.’

‘That was just what Henry and Susannah said,—at least, Susannah did, for I don’t think Henry cares much about it. But then, you see, there was Mr. Huddersfield, he could have been a kind of guardian, only he never seems to understand anything but his books. And Geoffrey is very strange; I should not quite like to have two nephews brought up like him. Anyhow,’ and Bessie coloured like a girl of fifteen, ‘I don’t know that I ought to have said all this, and, I hope you understand, my mother has likings as well as dislikings, and Ina and Cecil are very great favourites—Ina especially. I am sure you won’t take notice of what I have said.’

‘You may make your mind quite easy, Bessie, dear,’ was my answer; ‘I always bury family matters in a deep chest, and keep them under lock and key. The only thing I want to guard against is Charley’s talking about his friend, Frank, before Mrs. Penryhn; it might annoy her.’

‘She would not say anything if it did. She never does say when she is annoyed.’

‘So much the worse,’ I thought to myself, but I only said—‘You and I must be on the watch to turn the conversation, if necessary. Charley is perhaps not likely to come much in Mrs. Penryhn’s way,—thanks to his illness.’

‘Poor little fellow! no, but we should like to make him happy. We all wish to do that, and my mother and we are very glad to have you, and him, and all here.’

Poor dear Bessie! she did so earnestly wish to say something very cordial, and I am sure she felt it; but this history of likings and dislikings is alarming, for I am tolerably certain that I am one of Mrs. Penryhn’s dislikes.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

December 30.—Ina and Cecil came to me this morning for their Confirmation reading, and I think they liked it. I am sure I did, and that, perhaps, is the best guarantee that the reading was successful; one can always feel oneself when instruction of any kind is dull. I call it reading, but it really was much more conversation. They are very pleasant girls to have anything to do with—so intelligent and affectionate; and earnest, too, I think. Cecil, I am quite sure of. Ina, I cannot help fearing, has a taint of the world in her character. It shows itself not in any particular word or action, but in the whole tone. When I think of Lord Hopeton, and the party, on the 3rd, I am not surprised at it. Children imbibe worldliness as they do the air they breathe.

We began with my dear old Bishop, and his quaint exposition of the necessity of a catechism, as an assurance that members of the same church hold the same opinions, without which, as he declares, “a church must seem like to that state of the Cyclops, in Euripides, of which Silenus thus testifieth Ulysses: “No man, in anything, heard what the other said.” Or, if you had rather—like those builders at Babel, where men understood not one another, which hindered the work, because that one was not able to know what his fellow called for.’

We wandered from this into many questions, and some difficulties as to what constituted agreement in opinion, and how far disagreement within a Church may be allowed. People would say, probably, that such things

had nothing to do with preparation for Confirmation, which is a matter more of the heart than the intellect; but I hope, by God's help, to win these children's hearts through their intellects.

They enjoyed, I could perceive, being made to see the real bearings of questions which they have heard casually mentioned as matters of public interest. As Ina said to me, it was like having a blank window in her mind opened; and, from these general matters, the transition to more personal ones was easy and natural. The Church, in general, led to the Church of England in particular, and the duties incumbent upon all who are members of it; and so, at last, I reached their own special duties, and, with these, their temptations and faults. Ina confessed hers almost too willingly. 'She was vain,' she said, 'that she knew quite well, and self-indulgent; and, she was afraid, selfish, also, and very fond of having her own way.' Cecil seemed to think that she had all these faults, and a great many more besides, especially carelessness, and hasty temper; but I don't think she had mapped out her own character as clearly as Ina had hers. I felt, as Ina talked to me, that introspection was an unconscious interest to her, and I wished I could find the opportunity of telling her so: for faults are very like diseases; one may watch them till the contemplation becomes so engrossing that one should be sorry to part with them. Introspection would be a danger to Agnes also, though she has not Ina's vanity; it would lead to morbidness and scrupulosity. I thought of her as I was talking to these two girls, and felt how differently I should set to work with her if I were preparing her for Confirmation; how I should rather lead her away from any thought of herself—whether of faults or virtues—and bring her to rest only on her Saviour's love, and the delight of working for Him, and pleasing Him. She is so naturally devo-

tional, that she would at once respond to this sort of teaching; and so conscientious, that there would be no fear of self-deception. With Ina, on the contrary, there always must be the greatest fear of it, for she is not really conscientious. She delights in having her feelings worked upon, and, with very little effort, I could rouse her to a fit of repentance, and even good resolutions, which would have their source in the same kind of excitement she would feel at the opera; but as for any real work or improvement, in consequence, I should expect none, or, at least, none which would be lasting. As to Cecil, hers is really a very unformed mind—exquisitely simple and true, singularly free from morbidness or exaggeration; not seeing very far into duties, or their meaning and importance, only taking them as they come, doing the best, and very sorry that that best is no better. But so winning to me! Perhaps because it is a mind so unlike my own, that it gives me rest. To look at her, and watch her, refreshes me like a fresh mountain breeze on a spring morning. And she grows daily in thoughtfulness. Those clear grey eyes—which were at one time merely bright childish eyes, and very often physically weak and suffering,—are deepening in expression, and, I could almost say, in colour, as the mind looks forth from them. She is very greatly bent upon improvement just now, especially in carefulness and thought for others. I can see it in so many little ways, and I have never observed the shadow of a jealous feeling towards Ina, though Mrs. Penryhn's partiality is so strongly marked. I think Cecil feels quite sure of me, and sometimes I begin to hope that this certainty may be sufficient for her for many years to come.

I am happy about her, and happier than I was about Ina. At the present moment she is unquestionably in earnest. She proved it by what followed our Confirmation reading.

When at the close Cecil kissed me, and ran away, Ina asked if she might stay, she had something particular to say; so she sat down again, and when she placed her hand in mine I felt it tremble as she said: 'Mamma, I wanted to tell you; I asked grandmamma if I might. Do you know—and she hesitated—Mrs. Randolph is coming here to-morrow?'

'I know it, dear child,' was my answer. 'Mrs. Bradshaw wrote me word of it.'

'Oh! I am so glad. Then you are not displeased?'

'I don't see what I am to be displeased about,' I replied. 'This is your grandmamma's house, and she has a right to ask to it whom she chooses.'

'But you are displeased a little. You don't like it?'

'Well,' I said, 'I will own that I wish it had been otherwise.'

'That is, you don't like Mrs. Randolph's coming. But do you mind my knowing about it?'

It was a very awkward question. I felt there was nothing to be done but to be quite honest, so I answered at once,—'I don't like your having little secrets apart from me; but as your grandmamma has been so long accustomed to tell you things, it is very natural that she should continue to do so.'

'But you think it wrong in me to listen to them?' said Ina.

'No, darling, certainly not wrong. You can't help yourself. But I should like you always to *wish* to tell me, and perhaps by-and-by you will.'

'I did wish it now,' said Ina; 'that is—at first I said to grandmamma, "mightn't I mention it to you?" And then she was vexed, and told me that if I could not keep things to myself I should do a great deal of mischief; and so it was impossible to say anything more.'

'Of course not,' I replied; 'and I dare say, Ina,' I

added, with a smile, 'you were not very sorry for it. You would like to see Mrs. Randolph here, and you would not wish me to interfere to prevent it.'

'Mamma, how you do guess, and know all things,' and Ina looked up at me with an expression which was almost alarm.

'I only judge from what I observe, and from what I know of human nature,' I said. 'There is no harm in the wish to see more of Mrs. Randolph; but there will be harm if you indulge it so as to become intimate with her against my warning.'

'But grandmamma is so fond of her!' exclaimed Ina.

'I can't pretend to know what reasons your grandmamma has for her fondness,' I said; 'but I am quite certain what reasons I have for not being fond, or at least not wishing that you should be so.'

'Only I can't go against grandmamma,' said Ina, persistingly.

'You don't wish to do so,' I replied. 'You must, my love, be true to yourself, if you ever wish to judge truly. It is, as you say, difficult to go against your grandmamma, and the difficulty is magnified by the fact that your own inclinations agree with hers. That is the plain state of the case; is it not?'

'I suppose so,' said Ina. 'But, mamma, I don't want you to be vexed. I shall be extremely sorry if you are.'

'You only want yourself to be pleased,' I said; 'that again is human nature. But the real question, Ina, is not about difficulties and inclination, but duty. Are you to be guided by your grandmamma or by me?'

Ina coloured to her very temples. 'I am very sorry to have displeased you, mamma,' she began; and her proud tone made me reproach myself, for, in my stupid eagerness to express myself plainly, I saw that I had gone

too far, and given her reason to think that I was jealous. I changed my manner directly.

‘Dear child,’ I said, ‘it is not in the least that you have displeased me; you have done nothing wrong. If your grandmamma told you not to mention Mrs. Randolph’s visit, it was impossible you should do so. But, if you ask me what you are to do for the future, then I say that, whilst showing all deference to your grandmamma, you are bound to remember that I wish you not to become intimate with Mrs. Randolph; by which I mean merely, that you are not to put yourself out of your way to be so. As your grandmamma’s guest, of course you must show her all due courtesy.’

‘It will be very difficult,’ sighed Ina.

‘Yes, very difficult; but where there is an honest intention, the right path is always made easier. And one thing, Ina, I must say very strongly, that, under no circumstances, must you at all mix yourself up with Mrs. Randolph’s affairs, by writing, or sending notes, or messages. Even if it were to come to a question of displeasing your grandmamma, you must ask not to be required to do anything which you are forbidden to mention to me.’

Ina looked grievously worried, and I could entirely sympathise with her, but what was to be done? I assured her that it troubled me greatly to be obliged to say all this; that I only wished her to be quite free; that I entirely understood how next to impossible it must seem to her, in any way to go against what her grandmamma wished; that, in fact, I would do everything in my power to make things smooth for her, and would not be suspicious, or quick at taking offence. I would, in short, trust her entirely, in the full confidence that she would do her best to act wisely under all circumstances. And then I added a few grave words about the Confirmation,

and how important it was, at such a time, to have her mind quite clear as to her duty, so that she might ask God's blessing upon her actions, and trust to Him for guidance. Self-deceit, a double mind, sophistry of any kind, just now, as I showed her, would be evil multiplied tenfold, because God's blessing in His ordinances is given according to the sincerity of heart with which we approach them.

Ina was really touched then; not merely excited or sentimentalized (if I may coin a new word). She burst into tears, and poured forth an acknowledgment of all the folly and wilfulness which have been mixed up with her relations with Mrs. Randolph,—a confession which was very distressing to me, chiefly because it had not been made when I spoke to her before; but which also, to a certain extent, relieved my mind, because it gave me hope that, for the future, she would be more careful, and would certainly treat me with confidence. The facts were small in themselves, but of consequence, because they were done with the consciousness that I should not thoroughly approve. Ina has been used several times as the vehicle for sending messages and letters, and when I met her that day by the Woodleigh Lodge she was really waiting for Mrs. Randolph to tell her something her grandmamma had said.

It was very difficult to find fault with her, because she assured me that Mrs. Penryhn always insisted upon her giving the messages privately, though, many times, there was nothing in them.

This is Ina's account of them, but I suspect there must really have been more meant than met the ear. Mrs. Penryhn would never have made a secret of nothing.

I asked Ina whether she had ever done more than repeat the messages; and then she confessed that, in writing, she had sent her love to Mrs. Randolph, and wished they

could meet oftener : and once she had begged for a list of her favourite songs. The notes, I found, had been sent when the gardener went home to dinner, and the answers brought back by him. When I inquired why they had not been sent by Marietta, the answer was : ' Oh ! she was not always at hand ; and if she had been, I could not very well have told her anything, because of grandmamma's order.'

I think Ina was fully conscious, when she told me all this, that she had acted against the spirit of my wishes, and therefore wrongly. But there is a romance connected with Mrs. Randolph, which counteracts the effect of anything I can say. And this feeling is fostered by Mrs. Penryhn. Katherine Penryhn's dear friend is in her eyes a faultless, injured angel, and it is as such that she has been described to Ina. I am afraid it does irritate me, and touch my pride, to hear Ina say, ' Oh ! mamma, if you only knew everything ; if I might only tell you ; if you could but understand, you would think so differently of Mrs. Randolph.' What is there that I am not to know ?—that I can't understand ? Mrs. Bradshaw has given me Mrs. Randolph's history quite plainly. There is nothing mysterious in it. And this knowledge of facts (supposing them to exist) which are kept from me, puts Ina in such a false position with respect to me. I wonder Mrs. Penryhn does not see it. But I must be patient. There is nothing to be done. When one's relations with people are by nature crooked, they must always, I suppose, more or less remain so.

New Year's Eve, 18.—I feel as if I ought to write of graver things, and take a retrospect of the events of a year, fraught with such important changes and new responsibilities ; but I am very late, and must think my thoughts, not write them, and perhaps they will be more genuine for being only thought. One can never tho-

roughly get rid of the idea that some one may, some day, see one's journal. I would only record my thankfulness for having been guided so far on my way, and having been enabled, I hope, upon the whole, to deal not unwisely with the children. I shall be greatly relieved, if by this time next year (should my life be spared), I should have as much cause for satisfaction with them. Everyone is gone to bed. Bessie proposed something about sitting up to see the old year out and the new one in, but Mrs. Penryhn said she was tired, and I am afraid she did not very earnestly desire to welcome the new year with me, so we separated. It is a quarter to twelve. When the clock strikes, I shall go round and look at my children, if I may not venture to kiss them.

I have been—only Cecil was awake; but I had such a kiss from her—it went to my heart, and brought the tears to my eyes.

CHAPTER XXIX.

New Year's Day, 18.—A bright day, with a family gathering. Nothing else very particular to mark it, except the good resolutions which, I earnestly pray, may bring forth better fruit than any previous ones. What I have to learn is, I believe, to let myself be guided by God, and not to take the reins of life into my own hands. People fancy they cannot do this, but they can, and do. There is a mystery in God's will and man's will which no one yet has ever fathomed; but the fact that we can will, and that, in some marvellous way, events are thus arranged, to a certain degree and in a certain sense, according to our will, is indisputable. It seems that the materials of life, like the constitution of the body, and the characteristics of the mind, are prepared for us, and we cannot alter them; but we may arrange them; and it is in carrying out this arrangement without reference to the indications of God's wishes (if we may be allowed to use the expression)—that we err. It is strange, very strange to me, to look back, and see how different my present life is from anything which I had ever prepared for myself in imagination. Such dreams have been destroyed! Such determinations absolutely set aside! If there was one thing more than another which as a girl I resolved, that I would never be, it was a stepmother. I had such a clear perception of the difficulties and awkwardness of the position; and, I remember, I used to argue about it furiously, and declare that it was unnatural—never intended; that it never could work for happiness;

and a great deal more of the same kind; and the very first thing I did when I came to what are called years of discretion, was to marry a man with two children. So again, I resolved secretly, but very decidedly, that I would keep the children with me, and embue them thoroughly with my own principles, before I allowed them again to be with the Penryhn family; and here I am spending my first English Christmas-day with them at Arling. And again, I made all but a vow to avoid Mrs. Randolph, and now I am expecting, in a few days, to be living in the same house with her. The conclusion arrived at from all this is, that such resolutions are well enough for to-day, but were never intended for to-morrow; that life is, in fact, to be a daily life, with daily work, daily joys, daily sorrows. So one comes back to the petition in the Lord's Prayer—'Give us this day our daily bread.' I hope to think a good deal of those few words, and find out more of their meaning, and make them my motto for the year just entered upon.

January 2.—Mrs. Randolph is here. Her coming was taken as a matter of indifference by Mrs. Penryhn, and though alluded to in my presence, was not formally notified to me. She arrived about six o'clock. Bessie went to the station for her. It was a bitterly cold evening, and Mrs. Penryhn was full of thought for her comfort. A luxurious arm-chair drawn close to the fire, with a pretty little table by its side, and a most delicate set of tea things standing upon it, were all in readiness for her. And when she came there was such a warm greeting! I will not say that it exactly made me envious, for I had nothing to complain of in my own reception, but there was a heartiness in it which I had missed, and to which indeed I had no right.

And really, if I had known nothing about Mrs. Randolph before, I should have said that she deserved the

warmth. Her gratitude and pleasure, and genuine affection, made her so very pleasant. And she was amusing, too; giving us, in a fresh, un-English way, an account of her travelling adventures, and how she had been obliged to devote herself to the care of a rheumatic old gentleman, and a fractious baby. Just the sort of kindness I can imagine she would show. She looked very pretty, as she sat by the fire, with her large fur cloak thrown across one shoulder; and holding in her hand a most picturesque hat with a fur rim, totally unlike anything that anyone else would have worn. She was very civil to me, and I hope I was civil to her. I had no intention of being otherwise; but I feel every day, more and more, the next to impossibility of concealing from persons what I feel and think about them. There is something in my own mind, which goes so entirely against any appearance of feeling which has not a foundation in reality, that, in the very effort to overcome a prejudice, or an incipient dislike, I become cold and disagreeable; and give the idea that I am far more inimical than I really am. I always try to remember what Mrs. Bradshaw said about Mrs. Randolph's truth; but then she has led Ina into things which are certainly not strictly true. I wish she was safe out of the house. Having said that, I am more comfortable.

Ina is bewitched; it is the only word to use. She stood apart for some time—remembering, I am sure, my injunctions—but her eyes were fixed upon Mrs. Randolph's face, and presently she was beckoned to, and made to come nearer; and then she sat down on a stool by the easy chair, and Mrs. Randolph took her hand, and smoothed it, and called her pet, and Mrs. Penryhn looked on with a pleased smile. I went away, for I could bear it no longer. The evening was short, for we did not dine till after seven, and Mrs. Randolph was tired and went to bed before ten. The conversation was entirely about

mutual friends. I listened for any remark which showed good sense or high principle, but I heard nothing except chatter, intermixed with superlative adjectives applied to special favourites; 'dearest, sweetest,' and (Mrs. Randolph affects eccentricity in language as well as dress) 'darlingest and lovingest.'

January 3, 18—.—The house is in confusion,—carpets up, floors strewn with evergreens, servants rushing about, everyone wanting everything at the same moment,—in fact, what a house generally is when a large party is to be given. I have come away to rest. The morning has been spent in decorating the dining-room. Mrs. Randolph has exquisite taste, and is the moving spring of the ornamental work. No one, looking at her, could possibly believe that she has such a load of care upon her mind. Even Mrs. Huddersfield, who appeared early this morning with Celia and Stasey, succumbs to her in this particular department. Those two girls are really very quick, good-tempered, useful girls. They might have been very pleasant, if they had never been varnished; and working as we did to-day all together, the varnish was every now and then rubbed off in parts, and the genuine *creature* appeared. They begged to call me 'Aunt Mary.' I thought they might have waited till I made the offer to them, but one must accept nineteenth century manners; and I was very willing to be on such pleasant terms. So we worked together, Cecil and Agnes assisting; and managed to make some very pretty wreaths and festoons. Charley begged to sit in the arm-chair by the fire, and watch us; and Hugh and Essie came in and handed about tin-tacks, and were nearly swept out again with a heap of evergreens. Ina, I really think, tried to keep with me, and not devote herself to Mrs. Randolph; but it was almost impossible, for she was called upon at every moment to come and give her opinion upon the effect of flowers, or

branches, or drapery ; and now and then, when she ventured to suggest an improvement, she was rewarded by such a sweet smile and such pleasant flattering words, that no wonder her poor little head is rather turned. She was told once that she had such a correct taste, it was a pity she could not make the ornamentation of rooms a profession ; and, though she laughed, yet I saw how the words worked, by the way in which afterwards she glided round, offering little suggestions to everyone except myself ; and actually once taking Celia Huddersfield's work out of her hands. I don't think Celia liked it. Girls are so quickly alive to anything like assumption, and though they may, and too often do, learn much evil at school, there is one thing taught them there which they could never learn as well elsewhere ; and that is, to discriminate the small indications of character, and especially to resent and ridicule conceit and self-importance. I have observed before, that Ina's quiet way of putting herself first, and taking it for granted that she knows how to do everything, has irritated Celia ; and to-day it was very evident, and I thought once they would have come to an open quarrel. I did not interfere, for I felt that Ina would not be the worse for a set-down from a companion of her own age, who would be likely to tell her some home truths ; and I knew that if I ventured to say anything, I should only have engaged Mrs. Randolph in Ina's defence. Besides, there really was so little to find fault with. There are some actions which betray character just as the expression of the face does, and which are equally undefinable and intangible.

* * * * *

The afternoon letters are just come. They are nearly an hour late. We generally have them about half-past three. To-day, in consequence of some slight railway accident, they were not brought till four. We had been remark-

ing upon the delay, and wondering at it. Mrs. Randolph, however, had said nothing; and I supposed, as she only arrived yesterday, that she did not expect letters. Yet I saw her turn pale once, when one of the servants brought in a note and she thought it came by post; and she sat down, and I noticed that her hand trembled. Now that I have read Mrs. Bradshaw's letter to myself, I do not wonder at her agitation.

‘Dernham, January 2, 18—.

‘My dear Friend,—I retract my assertion as to Julia Randolph's truth. If she speaks truth, she acts falsehood. I would declare I will have nothing more to do with her; only I know, that if I say so to-day, I shall go against my *say* to-morrow. I take it for granted she is with you now, but she may be at the Hebrides, for aught I know to the contrary. Mr. Randolph was expected a day earlier. He gave us fair notice, and I thought, after all, we should achieve the meeting between him and his wife. He intended to be here yesterday, the 1st; so he wrote us word the previous day. Our friend took the intelligence very quietly,—spent the day, as Marietta tells me, just like any other day; went to bed,—and the next morning was gone, leaving a note for Marietta, to say that she meant to be at Arling on the 2nd; and begging that all letters might be forwarded to her there. Where she went to in the meantime, no one can tell; only the report is, that she was with Lady Chase at Westford, and her husband fully believes it.

‘Is it not grievous, that a woman whose chief faults arise from cowardice and wilfulness—nothing else—should do things which give the world such a handle for gossip and scandal? And you can believe the said world is not idle. Servants talk, and say that Mrs. Randolph went off because she was afraid to meet her husband (perfectly true; though, if she had met him in a right spirit, he must have

forgiven her). And the world says, that Lady Chase is simply disreputable, and that if Mrs. Randolph goes there, she is disreputable too; and more than all, and more vexatious a thousandfold, somehow or another your Ina's name, and I am afraid, as a natural consequence, yours too, is mixed up with the matter. I tell you;—I should be no friend if I did not. You may trust to me to set people right, as entirely and as quickly as I possibly can; but this man—this cross-grained, perverse, prejudiced, and most suspicious of mortals, Mr. Randolph—is an almost insurmountable obstacle to anything like explanation.

‘We had a terrible scene when he arrived—four o’clock in the afternoon—New Year’s day.—Such a beginning of the new year! I feel sure that he had worked at himself, disciplined himself (for there is something noble in the man’s nature), to be forbearing and forgiving. His wife’s request that he would come—cold though it was—had, I suspect, touched him. I was there, for Marietta entreated me to stay with her. He came in—asked for his wife;—silence. The question repeated. I replied, she was gone. Marietta said, “to Arling;” and then, for she is truth itself, added, “at least, she wrote in her note that she would be there to-morrow.” I can’t give you all the particulars. Perhaps you never had to deal with a suspicious person; if so, I congratulate you; the aggravations are indescribable. Marietta tried to make everything appear simple and natural, and, of course, failed; and then I spoke, and said plainly that his wife was afraid to meet him. He caught me up before I could finish my sentence, and coolly and sarcastically questioned and cross-questioned,—misunderstanding, misinterpreting, irritating me; till, at last, I fairly told him I must decline answering him any more. When he found he could get nothing more out of me, he turned to Marietta. She, poor child! is really fond of him, and dreads his displea-

sure above all things ; and she knew he felt that somehow she had failed in her duty, by letting Mrs. Randolph escape out of her hands. So she burst into tears, and, in her intense truthfulness, was infinitely more penitent and confidential than was at all wise, for she told him all kinds of little things, which only added fuel to the flame. She owned that constant communications had been kept up with Lady Chase ; that the notes were never shown to her. She told, when he questioned her, the fashions of the house when that wretched Baron von Bronnen and his wife were here, and very unsatisfactory they were. She confessed that Mrs. Randolph paid her bills with money which did not come from her husband ; and here there was a kind of double mystery and hesitation, which I could not understand myself. As for Mr. Randolph, he turned away, and said bitterly, " I see, Marietta—false, like everyone else in this miserable house ! " And then followed such a fierce pull at the bell ! The butler came in, and was subject, in his turn, to cross-examination. It was he who first mentioned Ina's name. He believed that his mistress was in the habit of sending letters to different persons through Miss Anstruther. (How I started—all but exclaimed !) Mr. Randolph turned to me :—" Who was Miss Anstruther?—where did she come from?—where did she live ? Did I know anything about it?—did Marietta ? " We both knew just so much as to be unable entirely to contradict the assertion ; and neither of us could say, before the servant, what we believed the notes were about. It would have done no good, if we could ; we were not to be heard. " We had been untrue—we had deceived. He would get to the bottom of this business before he had done. Where was the lady's-maid ? " I could almost have laughed, wretched as I was ; and if he had not been such an idiot, I could have pitied him. Never was a man more fully convinced he was in the midst of a nest of traitors.

‘Jane Simpson appeared—you know her scared look—and I suspect the butler had told her what to expect. She is a weak, vain thing, but I do believe honest and truth-telling; only she had picked up her version of things from the butler, and the gardener; and again we were told that Mrs. Randolph kept up private communications through Miss—or, as it was now, Mrs. and Miss Anstruther. I thought Mr. Randolph would have started after you both on the instant, but a chance word of poor silly Jane kept him back. She was very sorry for it all; she wished her mistress had said where she was going, but she was quite sure she would not go far; and Simon, the gardener’s son, said he had seen her go into my Lady Chase’s house at Westford. “My Lady who?” My dear, Mr. Randolph swore; but I believe it was for the first time in his life. Jane whimpered, and repeated the name; and then, I fairly confess, I pitied the poor man. He sat down, covered his face with his hands, and, for more than five minutes, he never spoke a word. I made Jane go away, and I was going myself, but Marietta looked at me so imploringly, I couldn’t. The hopeless part of the whole affair was, the man’s unreasonableness and his inveterate suspicion, though what he suspected I really cannot tell. When he looked up again, his face was ghastly. He said not a word to either Marietta or me, but walked straight out of the house. I waited with Marietta till eight o’clock, when he had not come back; and then I was obliged to leave her. This morning I have had a note from her, saying that he is impenetrably silent, only busy in collecting the tradesmen’s bills, and settling with them. She believes he will leave Woodleigh to-morrow. In the meantime I hear from various quarters that the Woodleigh affairs are the talk of both Dernham and Westford, and that everyone says how grievous and wrong it is that Mrs. and Miss Anstruther should be mixed up with such a business,

but it is not to be wondered at, as they have been so intimate with Mrs. Randolph. I don't pretend to explain what is meant by this; but, dear friend, help me to contradict what I can. Let me know precisely, what part your Ina has taken in this poor wilful woman's affairs. I dare say it is infinitesimally small; but as I do happen to know that some letters were sent privately, I can't give a full contradiction; and a half one is worse than none.

'Marietta is coming to me. I could not leave her in that house alone. She is broken-hearted, because she declares that she has lost her uncle's confidence; but as I could say to her—only I am prudent, and don't—what is the confidence of a suspicious fool worth? Through all this the world goes round, and we go with it, and to-day there is to be a practising at the Church, and Marietta and I must be there, and look after time and tune, just as if we had the lightest hearts living. I dare say it is very good for us, and I shan't care unless we happen to encounter the Ansons. Henry has returned, but is kept close under the maternal wing. Don't think I am engrossed in Woodleigh worries, and can't think of you; but one can only undertake a certain quantity of care each day, there is no room for more; and as I can do nothing till I hear from you, I don't let myself think of you.

'Yours affectionately,

'C. BRADSHAW.'

I can make no comment upon this letter now. I must dress and go downstairs to enjoy, with what appetite I may, the sight of Ina opening the ball with Lord Hope-ton!! Oh, one's pride! What sharp wounds it has to receive in this struggle of life!

CHAPTER XXX.

January 4.—The day after the dance—weariness of body and mind, but no prospect of rest! Last night's events fully prevent that. I must note them in detail. They may be important. We were gay; the party was a very young party, many were mere children, and with some we played games. Their merriment almost made me merry. Ina looked—oh! so pretty, and so charmingly graceful, quiet, refined—mine would have been genuine mother's delight, but for the weight at my heart. I turned to Cecil,—a child,—almost as much so as Agnes; laughing heartily, dancing with all her heart, caring not the least who were her own partners, only thinking, as I could not but see, how she might do something helpful for everyone else. Ina was the young lady of the house '*par titre*;' but Cecil did the duties. I watched her till I might have forgotten my worries, if the sight of Mrs. Randolph had not recalled them. She was, to the outward eye, the gayest of all; that is no exaggeration. She had dressed herself in what she professed to call a kind of Persian costume. I never saw anything like it elsewhere; but it did for the occasion, and—I hope it is not uncharitable—for her purpose. Everyone looked at her. The turban which she wore suited the contour of her face; and, somehow, she can bear spangles, and ribbons, and flowers, and bright colours, as no one else can. Last night she was chiefly pink,—at least, that was the colour of a kind of spangled vest; and then there was a white skirt, with pink trimmings, and ribbons hanging about. I could envy the

dress-maker's powers of invention, and certainly I envied Mrs. Randolph's self-command—it could not have been indifference—when I felt what intense vexation I was suffering from the consequences of her conduct, and saw how utterly she appeared to have forgotten everything herself.

People told me I looked grave. Bessie came up, and asked if anything was the matter. Agnes made herself quite unhappy, because she thought I was tired with working at the evergreens; and she and Cecil would insist upon my sitting in an arm-chair in the corner, and went themselves to fetch lemonade for me. They were my chief attendants. I was otherwise left almost entirely to myself. Mrs. Penryhn introduced me to Lord Hopeton, a dull, rather awkward boy, looking even younger than his age. Mrs. Huddersfield did me the same favour with one or two stiff chaperones, who could talk of nothing but the weather. After that, I conclude, I was supposed to be sufficiently at home to make acquaintances for myself; and, at any other time, I might have done so easily, for I have lived too much in the world to be shy at a children's party. But I really could not exert myself, except to amuse the little ones, and for them I was scarcely wanted. Mrs. Randolph took care of them, and so—I could not help perceiving it—won for herself golden opinions. I heard Mrs. Penryhn asking her, again and again, if she was not tired, and thanking her for her exertions; and Mrs. Huddersfield, who was looking after the dancers, came into the library when the games were going on, and expressed a patronising approval; and I really could not wonder at them. Once I felt greatly touched by her myself. Celia Huddersfield begged her to sit down and rest, and placed a chair for her; and she did sit down for a moment, but started up again almost instantly, saying: 'I can't sit still, I can't stand still; let

me go on!’ And then a look came over her face, only momentary—I don’t imagine anyone else observed it—but such a desperate, heartaching, dreary expression! My impulse was to rush up to her, take her away by herself, and make her tell me all her troubles, and try to comfort her, and once more set her right.

But who can help her? Wild, wilful, self-reliant,—she is working for her own misery. Before the evening was over, I saw more clearly how impossible it would be to aid her.

The dancing had continued till eleven o’clock, the very little children were gone, and there was a talk of supper; I think it was scarcely ready, but there was a kind of lull and pause—people stood about in groups, and the young people looked impatient, and wanted another quadrille. Mrs. Randolph was asked to sing. She is as eccentric in this as in everything else, and it is quite a rare thing to get a song from her. But she was in a good-natured mood, and when Mrs. Penryhn pressed it, she sat down to the piano. Ina drew near. Music is to her what the magnet is to steel; she literally cannot resist it. Mrs. Randolph looked up at her, and said ‘I know your favourite,’ and began that most lovely of all Italian airs ‘*Dove sono.*’ We all stood round, entranced. Hers is a voice so full that it satisfies one with the sense of entire completeness—so clear, sweet, and thrilling, that it made me think of the notes of the angelic bird, which, as the old legend says, gave the doubting monk his foretaste of Heaven. And the song went on, and not a movement was made, and I thought I was listening to that and that alone, when the sense of a sound, rather than the actual perception of it, came over me; then it became distant, and seemed to go round by the back of the house. It was like the rumble of a carriage,—nothing surprising on such an evening, but it attracted

me. I lost the song, and listened again. There was now a little confusion in the hall—opening and shutting of doors—voices—then, (the drawing-room door was open, and I was very near it,) a man's voice, deep, determined, imperious; and the notes of Mrs. Randolph's song went off into a shrill cry, and, starting up, she rushed from the piano, and vanished through the adjoining room. Every one was in an agitation of surprise and alarm. Mrs. Penryhn and Mrs. Huddersfield hurried into the hall. Ina's impulse was to go after Mrs. Randolph, but I interposed, and followed her myself. I just caught sight of her, as she turned down a passage leading to the back staircase, by which she could reach her own room. Before I could overtake her she was safe there, with the door bolted, and no entreaties of mine could induce her to open it. She would not, indeed, answer or notice me, but I heard her pacing up and down the room like a mad woman, and every now and then uttering a kind of hysterical sob. I went down to find Bessie. I thought that, perhaps, she might gain admittance, though I was denied. The drawing-room was empty. Every one was gone in to supper—which was laid out in the morning room—and Bessie was presiding. When I went up to her, and asked her in a low voice to go to Mrs. Randolph, she answered in a quiet, nervous way, very unlike herself,—‘Leave her; leave her. Wait till they are all gone.’

I looked round for Mrs. Penryhn. She was not there. Mrs. Huddersfield, too, was absent. A strange kind of dulness had crept over everyone, and yet I could perceive a hidden curiosity and excitement. I heard one or two mammas and governesses making rather eager inquiries about carriages, wondering why they were not come, telling the young people that it would not do to go on dancing any more. Ina came up and whispered, ‘Mamma, what is it? Is Mrs. Randolph ill?’ to which question,

of course, I could give no answer; and Ina looked hurt,—as though she imagined I was keeping something from her. It really did seem an interminable time, before all the sandwiches, and jellies, and cakes, had been eaten, and the cloaks and shawls put on, and the ‘good nights’ spoken;—three-quarters of an hour, I am sure, it must have been; and still neither Mrs. Penryhn nor Mrs. Huddersfield appeared, and the murmur of voices was distinctly heard through the door, now closed, between the library and the drawing-room. People were too polite to inquire where their hostess was, but it was impossible not to wonder; and once or twice a man’s voice in the library was raised, so that I am sure, if we had tried to listen, we might have heard what was said. When the last guests were gone, and only the young Huddersfields remained, Bessie said, quietly, ‘My dears, you had better go and stay in the dining-room, with Ina and Cecil, till your mamma is ready.’ And the young people obeyed: Cecil at once, Ina lingeringly, whilst Stasey and Celia Huddersfield ran out into the hall; and when I took the precaution to follow them and see where they went, I found Stasey examining a stranger’s hat, which had been left on one of the hall chairs. I merely said ‘If you wish to know who your grandmamma’s visitor is, my dear, you had better wait till you wish her good night, and then ask her.’ Stasey slunk away, and I heard her tittering with Celia in the dining-room, and very much I wished that Ina and Cecil were not forced to keep them company there; or at least, that Mr. Huddersfield and Geoffrey had been with them, to be a little restraint upon this intolerable ill-breeding, but they had both departed long before. I came back to the drawing-room. Bessie was standing by the fire. She said, without turning to look at me, ‘Mr. Randolph is here.’

‘Yes,’ I said; ‘I guessed it. Won’t you go to his wife?’

‘My mother must go,’ said Bessie. ‘She will be here in a minute.’

I felt, and I dare say I looked, surprised and uneasy.

‘My mother is the only person to deal with Julia Randolph,’ persisted Bessie. ‘I may do harm. Don’t think me a coward, Mary.’

‘You know best, of course,’ I said; ‘but it seems to me sad to leave her to herself.’

‘It will be worse to say and do just the wrong thing,’ continued Bessie. ‘We have had scenes with her here before, and I have learned that it is best to keep out of them.’

Just as she spoke, the library door opened. Mrs. Penryhn and Mrs. Huddersfield came in; and, without a word of explanation, Mrs. Penryhn walked up to me, and said, in a haughty, constrained tone, ‘Mrs. Anstruther, Mr. Randolph wishes to speak to you; perhaps you will be good enough to accompany me.’ She turned back again. I followed. As we entered the library, Mrs. Penryhn merely said, ‘Mrs. Anstruther, Mr. Randolph,’ and then she retreated, and I was left alone with Mr. Randolph.

The room was dim; the lamp had been taken away, and only the candles in the lustre were left; but, as Mr. Randolph stood up by the fireplace, leaning one elbow on the mantel-piece, the light fell full upon his face and the upper part of his figure. He is very tall and slight; his hair is dark, but his whiskers are grey, and a grey moustache nearly conceals his mouth. As for his features, I took no note of them, though I believe he is decidedly handsome. I saw only the expression—restless, suspicious, and sternly imperious. I went up to him; he bowed, and looked round, to be quite sure that the library door was closed. Then he tried that which led into the passage; after which he came and sat down in one of

the large arm-chairs, and I sat opposite, waiting till he chose to speak.

‘I have requested the favour of this interview,’ he began, and then he paused; his voice was peculiarly harsh, and he had evidently some difficulty of utterance—probably the remains of a stammer. ‘My name, of course, is well known to you,’ he continued.—Another long pause—I managed to break it, and said, I understood that he wished to speak to me on some particular business. I should be glad to hear what it was.

‘I—I—Mrs. Anstruther, you must pardon me. It is most painful, but I am bound to know—I must know—by what right you and your daughter—I should have wished to speak to Miss Anstruther also—have ventured to interfere with my domestic affairs—to advise my wife, to assist her; to support her in opposition to me;—in concealment, in conduct which cannot be overlooked;—which no husband would be justified in overlooking.’ He spoke slowly, pointedly, just a few words at a time, his eye glancing round the room all the time, as though he feared a listener or a spy in every corner.

I tried to speak as slowly, but it was an intense effort. ‘Mr. Randolph,’ I said, ‘you allude to things with which I have no concern. Mrs. Randolph and myself are not on sufficiently intimate terms to admit of my interfering with her affairs.’

‘Madam! Are you in earnest? Can you venture to deny—will you tell me, that you have not been the medium of a correspondence between my wife and a woman whose name I should desire never to mention—Lady Chase?’

‘Certainly,’ I replied. ‘I can most distinctly deny anything of the kind. My daughter——’

He broke into the sentence. ‘Your daughter, madam! She is yourself. You are answerable for her. And let

me warn you, that if you neglect this reponsibility, the consequences will be most serious.'

'If you will allow me to explain,' I began; but he again stopped me.

'Of what use, madam, are explanations? Has your daughter sent letters for my wife, or has she not?'

'She has sent notes—messages—to Mrs. Penryhn.'

'It matters not to whom. I know more of this matter, madam, than it appears that you do. Your daughter has sent notes, she has been the medium of a secret correspondence. Equivocations—I crave pardon for using an obnoxious word—are useless.' Then came one of his sudden pauses, and I took advantage of it.

Rising from my seat I said, 'Mr. Randolph, it is very late, and I am extremely tired. It will be much better that I should write what I have to say than speak it. You shall hear from me to-morrow. I have the honour of wishing you good night.' I just glanced at him, and saw a strange kind of nervous twitching of the muscles, as he was going to reply; but I did not choose to wait till the power of utterance came, and quietly walked out of the room. I made my way by the back staircase to my own apartment, and ringing the bell, I sent a message to beg that I might see Mrs. Penryhn. But I waited and waited, and no answer, and no Mrs. Penryhn came. I went out into the passage, and listened for some time; I heard voices and talking below, and then the hall door was shut and a carriage drove away, and after that there was silence. I went along the corridor to Bessie's room, but it was empty. I passed Mrs. Randolph's door, and heard no sound. And at last, quite despairing of any explanation or comfort that night, I went to bed, to lie awake and think.

CHAPTER XXXI.

January 5 (continuation).—It was eight o'clock before I woke—a dark, gloomy morning, rain pelting against the windows, the wind howling through the trees. I had slept a couple of hours—no more, and I felt utterly exhausted. Before I was dressed, a note was brought to me.

‘Madam,—Your retreat last night, is a sufficient proof of the truth of the accusations brought against your daughter, if not against yourself. As a gentleman, I desire to spare your feelings; and I consent to be silent with regard to the past, if you will give me your written promise, that all intercourse between yourself and your daughter and my wife shall from this period cease.

‘I have the honour to be, Madam,

‘Your obedient servant,

‘JOHN RANDOLPH.’

The man is mad! That was the only thing I could say. But I blamed myself. I ought not to have left him the previous night. I ought to have insisted upon his hearing my explanations; but really, at the moment, I felt so insulted, that I could not stay and listen to him; and perhaps, after all, I should have done no good. If he could take up my words in that perverse way, I could never have made him see what the facts really were; at any rate, it was too late to repent of what was past. All I had to think of was, how to act now? As to giving any pledge with regard to intercourse, it was an absurdity. No one

wishes more than myself to stop the intimacy, if such it may be called; but as to making a promise to a man like Mr. Randolph, it would be merely giving him the power of being more interfering and impertinent. I begin to feel with Mrs. Bradshaw, that, whatever may be his wife's offences, she must have a good deal of excuse for them. I went downstairs, and found no one in the dining-room except Bessie. Prayers were over; she had made the tea, and was waiting for Mrs. Penryhn to begin breakfast. I enquired if she had seen or heard anything of Mr. Randolph, and was answered in the negative. I asked what became of Mr. Randolph last night, and Bessie told me she believed he went to the village inn to sleep, and would call again this morning. I asked if she thought that his wife would see him, and Bessie answered, that she could not pretend to say. Her manner, I thought, was constrained, very unlike what it is usually; and I could not help saying, 'Bessie, what is the matter?'

'Nothing, nothing.'

Which of course meant something; so I continued,—
'Are you vexed with me?'

'Vexed? oh, no! what have I to be vexed about?'

'But there is something; you are so very strange.'

'Hush—pray don't let us talk about it;' and Bessie held up her hand entreatingly, and at the same instant Mrs. Penryhn came into the room.

She is always more or less stiff with me, but this morning she was a piece of ice. I made one or two remarks upon the success of the party, and she just answered me; that was all. That she was irritated, I could see by the way in which she complained of everything;—the tea was cold, the toast dry, the eggs were not sufficiently boiled. Bessie was told to ring the bell, just as if she had been a child of five years old. When the man appeared, an order was given to send Groves—

Mrs. Penryhn's maid—that she might take Mrs. Randolph's breakfast upstairs.

I chose to be bold then, and I enquired if Mrs. Randolph was tired after last night?

'I imagine she is, as she desires to breakfast in her own room;' and then we all relapsed into silence.

I supposed I should learn what was amiss in due course of time, and in the meanwhile I might employ my thoughts in considering what I was to say to Ina.

The most important thing would be, to make quite certain that she had told me the whole truth, without the slightest reservation. I could not help having a mis-giving upon this point. It seemed to me quite impossible, that such a mountain of accusation should have arisen from the mere fact of her having sent notes and messages backwards and forwards between her grandmamma and Mrs. Randolph; and there is just that in Ina—not quite untruthfulness, not quite deceit, but something approaching to both, which always makes me doubt, involuntarily, whether, in hearing an explanation from her, I have heard all.

I resolved to go to her as soon as breakfast was over, but I was prevented.

'I suppose the young people will appear in due course of time,' said Mrs. Penryhn. She declined Bessie's offer of another cup of tea, and then rising and turning to me, she said, 'Mrs. Anstruther, if you are disengaged, may I beg the favour of a few moments' conversation with you in the library?'

I assented, really relieved at the idea of learning something about all this mystery, though my heart sank, as it always does when anyone asks for a private conversation. It was strange, the kind of feeling I had of being again a girl, under order, liable to be scolded. It is a feeling I have had more or less ever since I came to Arling. I was

obliged to remind myself, as I followed Mrs. Penryhn's stately figure into the room which I had left in such an uncomfortable state of mind the night before, that I really was a person of mature age, a mother, not usually considered deficient in sense or principle; and certainly not conscious of having said or done anything which could give my fellow-creatures the right to sit in judgment upon me.

It seemed a kind of absurd repetition of the scene of last night, as Mrs. Penryhn and I seated ourselves opposite each other; but at any rate I had not to deal with a madman, and Mrs. Penryhn had no hesitation in beginning. 'You sent for me last night, Mrs. Anstruther, but I was detained by Mrs. Randolph, and when I afterwards went to your room, I found you were not there. Perhaps it was better that we should both have had a night's rest before entering upon disagreeable subjects.'

'Will you have the goodness to explain what you mean?' I said, I am afraid very proudly.

'That can scarcely be necessary, after your full acknowledgement to Mr. Randolph.'

'What!' I exclaimed. 'Mr. Randolph cannot be in his right mind. I acknowledged nothing!'

'But you contradicted nothing, which, perhaps, comes to the same thing,' said Mrs. Penryhn, with an air of supreme dignity.

'Mrs. Penryhn,' I said, 'this is really trying me too far. Mr. Randolph accused me of having been privy to some secret correspondence. He accused Ina, also. You know to whom the fact of secrecy, with regard to Mrs. Randolph and Ina, to which Mr. Randolph refers, is to be attributed; and for any explanation, I must turn to yourself.'

'I thought it would be so,' she exclaimed, indignantly. 'I told Mr. Randolph last night, that I could not but fear

an attempt would be made to mix me up with this unhappy business; being, as I am, one of his wife's oldest friends. But, allow me to say, Mrs. Anstruther, that it will be perfectly useless. My course has all along been so simple and intelligible, that it is impossible to misunderstand it. I wrote to my grandchild—she wrote to me. I expected, as a matter of right and duty, that no one should interfere between us, and so far the correspondence was secret; but to mix up this natural proceeding with a charge of making use of Ina as the means of interfering secretly and wrongly with Mrs. Randolph's affairs, and encouraging her intimacy with Lady Chase, is really—you must forgive me for saying so—monstrous.'

'But,' I said, 'you urged Ina not to show her letters—not to tell what the messages were which were sent.'

'Of course I did. I wished to insist upon a general rule, and from time to time I reminded Ina of it. I desired to write freely. I wished for no supervision or interference.'

The last words were spoken in a tone which galled me almost beyond endurance. I would not trust myself to answer at the moment, and Mrs. Penryhn continued: 'Mr. Randolph is not a calm-judging man. At the present time his feelings are greatly exasperated; but even he had no difficulty in seeing where the fault lay.'

By this time I felt so utterly mystified, that I almost began to think that, in some way or other, I had been interfering with Mrs. Randolph. I could only say, 'It is all incomprehensible—I don't understand.'

'I am not surprised at that,' continued Mrs. Penryhn. 'When persons act unwisely, and get themselves into difficulties, it is not easy to see how the mischief has arisen. If, when Lady Chase settled in the neighbourhood, and you became aware of the fascination which she was likely to exercise over our poor weak friend (for I must confess,

fond though I am of Mrs. Randolph, that she is weak), if you had then at once drawn back, or given Mr. Randolph warning, or in any way checked her in her imprudent course, you would have done the kind and right thing by her. But, instead of this, your extreme intimacy——’

‘With Mrs. Randolph!’ I exclaimed, in astonishment; ‘but I have never been in the least intimate with her.’

‘But only with her niece;—I was about to say so. The young people have been thrown together—very naturally, I dare say; but still, under the circumstances, finding that everything was not quite as you wished, it would, unquestionably, have been more prudent,—you must allow me to say so, as a person so much older than yourself, and so deeply interested for my poor grandchildren (here Mrs. Penryhn gave a deep sigh),—it would have been more wise to have been cautious. Such very unrestrained companionship is never desirable for young people; and, of course, it gave dear Ina the idea that you sanctioned everything that went on at Woodleigh; and so, as I said to Mr. Randolph last night, I have no doubt she thought that everything which our unhappy friend asked her to do was right, and should be done.’

‘But what has Ina done?’ I inquired. ‘You seem to know very much more, Mrs. Penryhn, than I do. I am still hopelessly in the dark.’

‘You might have been enlightened, if you could have controlled yourself sufficiently to listen to Mr. Randolph last night,’ said Mrs. Penryhn. ‘He came to me, greatly surprised at the sudden termination of the interview, and, naturally enough, putting but one interpretation upon it.’

Upon this insinuation I made no comment, but merely repeated my question—‘What has Ina done?’

‘Mr. Randolph assures me,’ replied Mrs. Penryhn,—‘he says he has abundant evidence to prove it,—that

through Ina—or it may have been yourself (I merely repeat his words)—letters and messages have been sent to Lady Chase which Mrs. Randolph was afraid to trust to the post; and that answers have been received through the same channel. As a husband anxious for his wife's respectability, he has, as he confesses, kept a watch over her correspondence. I do not justify him in this—I merely state the fact. He says, and I am afraid I cannot but agree with him, that such a thing could not have been done without your knowledge; or that, if it were, it argues a very culpable negligence on your part.'

The tone and purport of this speech were really more than I could submit to. 'Mrs. Penryhn,' I said, 'I do not admit any right on your part, still less on that of Mr. Randolph, to pass judgment upon my conduct. I attempt no explanation. Truth and exaggeration, and misrepresentation, are so mingled in all that has been said upon this unfortunate affair, that I despair of disentangling them. I only deny, once for all, having a knowledge of any communications from Mrs. Randolph that have passed through Ina, except those which related to yourself. If Ina, unknown to me, sent letters to Lady Chase, she did exceedingly wrong; but, till I hear the confession from her own lips, I do not choose to believe it. I shall go now, and enquire of her myself.' Mrs. Penryhn would have detained me, but I left her. Before going to Ina, however, I went to my own room, to think, and to ask help also; for I began to perceive that this matter would be far more perplexing and painful than I had at first anticipated. So perfectly innocent as I was, and so fully aware that the fault of encouraging Ina in secrecy lay with Mrs. Penryhn, it had never occurred to me, that any blame could be laid to my charge. What struck me most, as I recalled what Mrs. Penryhn had said, was the ingenious way in which she

had managed to connect facts together, and deduce accusations from them, so as to divert attention from the main point which concerned herself. Her own correspondence with Ina was taken as the most simple, natural, straightforward thing in the world; whilst the fact that Marietta and Ina had been intimate, was, somehow or other, assumed to be an imprudence for which I was answerable; and which was the origin of Ina's being mixed up with Mrs. Randolph's follies. There was no logic in the deductions, at least to anyone who knew how things really were; but then no one does know that but myself, and really, I don't think I can bring myself to bandy words with Mrs. Penryhn, and turn round upon her, and say that it was only because she gave an introduction to Mrs. Randolph and her niece, that I felt myself at all justified in encouraging the acquaintance. Mrs. Penryhn is not straightforward, that is the plain truth; and I am beginning to learn that, in this complicated and mysterious life, a person who fights with the weapons of simple truth has no chance of immediate victory over one who condescends to employ those of equivocation and exaggeration. Victory, in that case, must be a question of time, and perhaps in this world there may even be no victory. It comforts me to think that a Day is coming in which all things shall be made plain.

I am thankful, however, for one thing,—that the blame is laid so much upon me, and not upon Ina. I think, with all her selfishness and want of sincerity, Mrs. Penryhn feels that Ina must be kept in the background as much as possible; and that it would be injurious to her, in every way, to be brought into contact with Mr. Randolph, and know all the mischief this foolish business is likely to cause. Perhaps it is for that reason that Mrs. Penryhn visits me with such a heavy condemnation. She must save herself, at some person's expense; and, as it cannot be

at Ina's, it must be at mine. Well! let it be so. I shall win my way at last, if I can only trust in God, and go straight on.

I could not see Ina for the next half-hour. She had gone down to breakfast. I sent for her to my own room, and before she came, I heard a voice downstairs which I was nearly sure was Mr. Randolph's. I was in perfect dread lest he should see her and say something, but, from what I heard afterwards, Mrs. Penryhn took immediate possession of him.

I prepared my work, and began to knit. I was determined Ina should not see how nervous and uncomfortable I was. It would have excited her curiosity, and nothing delights her more than having a little mystery to pry into. Still, I knew it would not do to keep the main facts from her, as she would certainly find them out, sooner or later; and then she would disbelieve me, and think I had not been open with her. She came in, looking rather pale, but so pretty and bright; and her manner to me, as she kissed me and asked if I was tired, was really charming in its affection and gracefulness.

I said to her aloud, immediately: 'Ina dear, I wanted to ask you once more about the letters you told me the other day you had enclosed or sent for Mrs. Randolph. There is some fuss about them. Were there any to any other person besides your grandmamma?'

'Oh no, mamma, no—that is—I don't quite recollect all the directions, I did not look at them much.'

'You must try to recollect, my dear,' I said gravely: 'Mr. Randolph wishes to know; and I think,' I added, 'that you must recollect, because you spoke so confidently, and assured me there were only a few notes for your grandmamma and from her.'

'Yes, I remember saying so,' she replied; 'and there were really no other notes or messages of any kind, none,

except just one day—but it was nothing, dear mamma;—please don't look so grave, it frightens me.'

'I do entreat you, my child, to tell me exactly everything,' I said; 'because Mr. Randolph is vexed with his wife for keeping up an acquaintance with a lady whom he disapproves of; and he thinks that you and I have assisted her in it.'

'You! Oh, mamma, mamma, how dreadful, how wicked in him!'

'Don't think about me, my love, think about yourself; let me know precisely what the facts are.'

'But there is nothing, mamma, really nothing; it was a very simple thing.—Mrs. Randolph sent in a note one day from grandmamma, and she wrote in the envelope, "If your gardener should be going into Westford this afternoon, will you ask him to call at Lady Chase's, No. 2, Merrion Place, and say that Mrs. Randolph will be there on Tuesday at four o'clock?" I was afraid Stephen might forget the message, and so I wrote it down for him, and directed it to Lady Chase. He left the paper at the house, I suppose. A written answer came back, that Lady Chase would be glad to see Mrs. Randolph; and I sent it on to Woodleigh. Once afterwards the same thing happened. That was all indeed.'

'And why did you not tell me this the other day?' I inquired.

'I forgot it just when we were talking, indeed I did;—and afterwards, when it came into my head, I thought that there was no good in saying anything about it, because you only seemed to care about the letters from grandmamma, and this had nothing to do with her.'

'But now tell me, Ina,' I said (and I am sure my tone must have been that of extreme vexation), 'if this message was so simple and unimportant, why was it not repeated to me at the time?'

‘Oh, mamma, because it came from Mrs. Randolph, and I knew she would not like me to repeat anything which came from her ; she would not trust me again.’

‘Did she ever tell you so?’

‘Not exactly ; but she thanked me for being so good and kind to her ; and grandmamma told me that she spoke of me so affectionately, and said she was sure that I was quite to be trusted. I knew what that meant.’

‘No doubt,’ I thought to myself. And yet Mrs. Penryhn can turn round, and accuse me of encouraging a secret correspondence !

‘And you are quite sure,’ I continued, ‘as you told me the other day, that Marietta knew nothing of any private notes or messages ? Pray remember exactly.’

‘Oh, nothing, nothing at all. Mrs. Randolph remarked to me once, that Marietta could not understand her, and therefore she could not tell her all her troubles, and I don’t think she ever did ; and Marietta was very strange about her aunt ; whenever I said anything she always shut up directly.’

‘And on what occasion was it that Mrs. Randolph spoke to you in this way about her troubles ?’ I asked. ‘You have had very few opportunities of talking with her alone.’

‘It was the day we were at the Lodge, when you came up and told me that I was not to go within the gates again. I have never been there since.’

Ina’s tone was that of a person who can lay claim to an absolutely clear conscience, and it made my heart sink.

‘My dear,’ I said, ‘it appears to me quite useless to attempt to show you that you have, from the beginning, been wrong in all this business ; I would rather show you the end. Mrs. Randolph is an imprudent and silly woman, and makes imprudent acquaintances. Her husband is very angry with her, and very angry with everyone who

has, in any way, assisted her. If you had attended to the spirit of my injunctions, you could not possibly have laid yourself open to blame; but you chose to act contrary to my advice, you followed your own will, because you had taken a fancy to Mrs. Randolph, and were, I suppose, pleased with a little mystery; and the result is, that you have brought upon me the charge of great imprudence, and exposed me to most painful censure. I must bear all this, I cannot let your name be brought forward; but it would be an infinite comfort to me, in my vexation, to feel that you thoroughly understood where you had been in fault, and I confess I very much question whether you do.'

'I should never have thought of keeping anything from you, if grandmamma had not sent the messages and notes,' said Ina, in the same self-justifying tone; 'but I did not know what to do then.'

'But, my dear, your grandmamma did not tell you to send a note to anyone else.'

'It was a message!'

'A message, or a note, it comes to the same thing. Still less did she tell you to go and talk to Mrs. Randolph, at the Woodleigh Lodge, when I had expressly desired you not to go within the gates. Besides, if your grandmamma had begged you to keep her letters to yourself, it would have been perfectly easy for you to have written to her, and told her, that although you would not, of course, show anything she wrote, yet, that you could not send letters to Mrs. Randolph without my knowledge, because, you knew, I should not like it. If you had really cared to please me, that is what you would have done.'

'It would have made grandmamma dreadfully angry,' said Ina. 'I don't think, mamma, you know.'

'Yes, my dear,' I said, 'I do know. Your grand-

mamma, very naturally, is not yet accustomed to my being placed in authority over you, instead of herself. She feels, as I dare say I should feel, in her place, that her claim upon your obedience is as great, if not greater, than mine. But, Ina, if you would only use your own good sense, and right feeling, you would be able to reconcile her to this state of things, more easily than any one. You know that I have no wish to put her aside; on the contrary, I desire that you should do everything you possibly can to please her. But the real fact is, that it is not a question between obeying your grandmamma, or obeying me, it is simply a question of your own will. This is your fault, your temptation. Whatever you take it into your head to do, that you determine to do; and, if you cannot carry out your object by direct means, you do it by indirect. I must put it before you in plain words: wilfulness has brought you into this difficulty, and wilfulness will bring you into a great many others, unless, through God's help, you acknowledge, and watch, and strive against it. Now, tell me one thing more: has Cecil any knowledge of this intercourse between you and Mrs. Randolph?'

'Oh, no, mamma! Cecil would never think of inquiring about anything; and, you know, grandmamma looks upon her as a child.'

'I am thankful for it,' was my inward comment, but I said, aloud,—'And there is no one, then, concerned in it but yourself?'

'No one, except,—I think, mamma, Agnes guessed something. She is so odd and so quick.'

Instantly I recalled to mind my poor little child's worry of mind just before we left home, and for the moment I felt vexed with myself that I had not inquired more into its cause. I asked what made Ina think that Agnes knew anything about the letters.

‘Because she once or twice came up whilst I was talking to Stephen in the garden; and once she overheard what I said.’

‘And did she make any remark?’

‘I did not let her. I told her to run away, and not trouble herself about what did not concern her. You know, mamma, it was the only thing I could do.’

‘Perhaps so,’ I said. ‘I don’t pretend to judge. I am not used to double ways, Ina.’

‘Oh, mamma, mamma; you are so hard upon me, so—’ she was going to say unkind—but a sense of respect stopped her.

‘I may be so,’ I said. ‘I will confess to you, very candidly, my dear child, that anything approaching to deceit is so entirely contrary to my nature, that when I meet with that which in the least looks like it, I am so sorely perplexed, that possibly I may be too severe upon it. I cannot, for instance, understand how the mere fact of the necessity for all this mystery should not have shown you that there was something wrong in your conduct; neither do I understand why, when you remembered that you had forgotten to mention the message to Lady Chase, you did not at once come and tell me so. When I was your age, Ina, I did a great many wrong, and a great many foolish, things, but I could no more have gone on, day after day, with a burden of concealment upon my conscience, than I could have flown. It would have made me miserable. I must have confessed it, let the consequences be what they might. But it is useless,’ I added—seeing Ina’s set, proud expression of face—‘to dwell upon this. If you cannot see what you have done, there is no good in my talking to you about it. All I can do now is, to be quite sure that I have heard the whole, and then to go and make the best explanation I can to Mr. Randolph. Will you tell me

then—is there anything—the smallest thing—kept back, or forgotten, or unexplained now?’

‘No, mamma, nothing.’

‘Very well. Then, my dear, I must beg you to remain here in my room, and not to leave it till I come back again.’

I had just reached the door, when Ina followed me, and caught hold of my hand. ‘Oh! mamma, don’t go away, don’t leave me. I was wrong—I know I was—but I didn’t mean it—I didn’t know—and must you see Mr. Randolph?’ I kissed her tenderly, and said, ‘Yes, I must see him; but if you can own that you were sorry, I care for nothing else. God bless you and help you, darling;’ and so I left her.

I went downstairs, intending to take the upper hand, and myself demand an interview with Mr. Randolph. I was almost inclined to desire that Mrs. Penryhn should be present also; but my lately acquired perception of her singular talent for twisting facts, and diverting attention from the main point, when it happened to tell against her, made me decide upon facing my antagonists separately.

But events were otherwise ordered. I went into the drawing-room, and found Mrs. Randolph upon the sofa in violent hysterics; Bessie standing by her, with sal volatile; Mrs. Penryhn half scolding, half petting her, and evidently herself in a state of great agitation; and before I could hear a word of explanation, there was a rush and noise in the hall, and into the room burst Celia and Stacey Huddersfield, and their mother, followed by a huge Newfoundland dog, which jumped upon Mrs. Randolph, and so completely frightened her, that it did far more than either sal volatile or scolding, towards restoring her to a natural state. I just said to Bessie, in a half whisper; ‘Where is Mr. Randolph?’ and the answer was ‘Gone;’ and, hearing this, I made my escape, and went back to my own room.

CHAPTER XXXII.

January 5.—I have fully expected an angry explanatory scene, or a catastrophe, but there has been neither. We go to-night to the Huddersfields'; we are asked to-morrow to a Christmas party, at Lord Worthington's; two days after, we are to go home.

It all comes so naturally, I can scarcely believe that the late excitement was a reality. And that strange woman, Mrs. Randolph!—she kept to her room yesterday, but to-day she is quite herself, and has been playing battledore and shuttlecock all the morning, and singing all the afternoon. Mrs. Penryhn, as usual, sits on the sofa, in stately sweetness and condescension, reading a little, and talking a little; and Bessie moves about from room to room, taking care that nothing shall come in her mother's way to put her out of humour. The children have had a little steady work and reading with me, and are now gone out in the garden; it is too stormy to go farther. I, alone, am somehow or other not quite in the same position as before. Mrs. Penryhn quietly said to me yesterday, in Mrs. Huddersfield's presence: 'We will talk no more of the past, my dear Mrs. Anstruther; we all make mistakes, and this has been an unfortunate one; but we will hope that nothing more disagreeable will follow. Mr. Randolph is a hasty-tempered, but not an ungentlemanly man; you may quite depend upon him;' and when I asked what she meant, she looked at me with surprise, and said that she was not at liberty to talk of Mr. Randolph's private affairs, but I might quite

trust to her to prevent, if possible, unpleasant things being said. Mrs. Huddersfield echoed her mother's assurance, and gave me very excellent cautions as to my future management of the children; saying that, with her long experience, she had seen and known a great deal, and had quite come to the conclusion that it did not do to trust girls too far; and even dear meek, simple, Bessie came to my room at night, and said that she was so very sorry for me, but she was quite sure I had meant everything for the best; and really Mrs. Randolph was so strange, that very likely she would have done just the same, whether I had encouraged her or not. I entreated for an explanation, but all I could get from her was, that she had promised her mother not to talk about anything which concerned Mrs. Randolph: in fact, her mother was convinced that the less said about her the better, it would only get everyone into difficulty; and so Bessie was very sorry, but she really must go to bed.

Oh! how I longed for Mrs. Bradshaw's straightforward, honest bluntness! How I long for it now! I puzzle myself with thinking what it all means, and can come to no conclusion, except that Mrs. Penryhn feels she has gone too far in supporting Mrs. Randolph; and now means to draw back, and lay the blame of anything foolish which has been done or said upon me.

I really did not know, before, how proud I was: but it is as much as I can possibly bear (rather more, indeed), to find myself placed in this position of being lectured and instructed. I think Mrs. Huddersfield tries me the most, she is so dreadfully sensible; she never says anything one can contradict; and now that she has found out, as she thinks, that I don't understand how to manage my children, she considers herself at liberty, if not called upon, to advise me upon all matters concerning them.

She began yesterday afternoon about their dress. "Had

we a good dress-maker at Westford? It was such an excellent plan to have a London dress-maker. It was not needful to have everything made there, but one or two dresses and patterns would be such a help; and the children's figures would be so improved by it. Agnes looked delicate, and was likely to grow crooked. I should make her lie down a good deal. Whenever she came in from her walk she ought to lie down. And going to bed early,—that was very important: but, above all things, exercise in the morning; it was so very bad for children to be kept at their studies too long together." In my heart I agreed to all, except, perhaps, the London dress-maker: but, I suppose my assent was not very hearty; for Mrs. Huddersfield went on to expatiate upon her own experience and my ignorance; the result, no doubt, of having been so long abroad. All this ended with a hope that they should see us early this evening, and that we should meet to-morrow at Arling Castle. As my stay was so short, it would be a great pity not to let the cousins be as much together as possible now; and perhaps Ina and Cecil might manage another visit at Easter. Companionship and change were very good for young people; it prevented them from becoming narrow-minded.

What is it that makes truth so disagreeable?

January 7.—Two evenings of excitement cannot be good for anyone, whatever Mrs. Huddersfield may be inclined to think. The children are quite wearied out to-day, and so am I. Last night, they were not in bed till half-past two; and the night before, it was after one. I cannot help thinking that late hours are at the bottom of more than half the mischief which people complain of in evening parties. If I were ever able to give the tone to the place I lived in, what I should very much wish to do would be to effect a reformation in this respect. The more I think, the more I am convinced that amusements

stand on precisely the same footing as eating and drinking, and that it is the excess which is the evil. At the Huddersfields', the party was small, and we had only Christmas games; which, however—as it struck me—gave just as much opportunity for vanity, conceit, and selfishness, as any other kind of amusement. I don't mean to say that there was any very remarkable exhibition of these faults; but still there they were. Mrs. Huddersfield told me that she had fixed upon games instead of dancing, because there were some persons present who objected to dancing. Very good and right on her part, and I respected her for giving in to her friends' scruples; but when the amusement began, and the young ladies who might not dance were appealed to to order the games, and displayed their quickness and talent with evident satisfaction, and the mothers looked on, and drew everyone's attention to them, I confess I felt, in my own mind, that there was just as much evil in one kind of recreation as in another. Certainly I should not have liked to see Ina or Cecil putting themselves so prominently forward.

At the Castle, we had really a splendid entertainment, and all kinds of amusements; snap-dragon, and a bullet pudding, and blindman's buff, for the little ones; and at last dancing—hearty, merry, young dancing, which it did me good to look at. Lady Worthington is a charmingly simple, kind-hearted person, and kept everything going. What delighted me most, I must confess, was to watch Cecil. That fascinating unselfishness and good-humour of hers, show themselves so markedly in society; and then I, who know her well, know also the real principle which lies at the bottom. I happened to go to her room just before we set off for the Castle, and found her reading a little book I had given her as a kind of preparation for her Confirmation. She was quite ready, and looked so bright and happy, and so exquisitely simple and pure in

her white muslin dress ; and when I asked her if she had not had time for her reading before, her cheek flushed, and she said ‘ Oh ! yes,—but I dressed as quickly as I could, because then I thought I should be able to have some reading just at the last minute, so that I might not forget. There was no harm in it, was there ? ’

Dear child ! I am sure she did not forget ; for there was no one in the room, that I could see, half as thoughtful for others, or as free from self-consciousness ; and her laugh had a musical ring of gladness in it, which seemed as if it could scarcely belong to this sorrowful world.

She told me, when we came back, that she had had a most delightful evening. She did not think she had ever enjoyed herself so much before. Agnes was too tired. If I had known how late the party would be, I should not have taken her. She would have been happier at home with Charley, who is still kept very quiet, in hopes that he may quite recover, and be well enough to go back to school at the end of the month. Agnes is so very timid and shy, that strangers and large parties are a real oppression to her. It was partly the wish to fight against this over-sensitiveness, which made me take her with me to the Castle ; but I confess, I regretted it when I found what the evening was likely to be. I could not help being amused, as well as provoked at the efforts made by Mrs. Penryhn to throw Ina and Lord Hopeton together. Ina did not open the ball (as Mrs. Huddersfield called it) with him. There were persons of much higher rank than herself in the room ; but Mrs. Penryhn was determined to make up for this in other ways. Ina was continually his *vis-à-vis*, and Mrs. Penryhn kept him talking to her, and made him fetch lemonade and negus for her ; and in fact, as much as she could, compelled the poor boy to dance attendance upon her. Not that he disliked it, for Ina is very attractive, and to do her

justice, I don't think she was at all aware of her grandmother's object. But it was very odious to me. From my heart I can say, that one of the last things I should desire for Ina, would be to become a countess, and the mistress of Arling Castle. So far as I can see, I believe it would be precisely the thing to ruin her. It is all very well, when people are born to rank and wealth. Their position comes as naturally to them then, as it does to have a forehead and eyes; and all that is to be done, is to teach them to make a right use of it. But to be raised to it is quite a different thing; very few can stand it, and I do not believe that Ina would be amongst the few. And Lord Hopeton is a good-natured boy, but really nothing more—one can see it in his face. He would never guide a girl of Ina's character and talent.

But I shall try not to think about this manœuvring; it makes me cross and uncharitable. I have not been able to say much more to Ina about the late worries. Everything being glossed over, as it has been, I have little apparently to complain of; and I said, the other day, all that was to be said, as to the share she had in my annoyance. It will not do to be unfair, and make her answerable for results which she could not foresee; though it is very important to make her feel how serious they may be. For that reason, I could have been glad to endure a little more open persecution. This fashion of martyrising one negatively, is both ingenious and safe. My perplexity now is Mrs. Randolph. What is she going to do? and what is the state of affairs between her and her husband? I have found out that they had an interview the other morning, at which Mrs. Penryhn was present. Bessie told me so far, and added, that the great subject of dispute is Victor; and that it was because of him that Mrs. Randolph was so upset; but what that implies I do not know, neither does she. One thing is

certain,—that there is no idea of Mrs. Randolph's leaving Arling at present. I doubt if Mrs. Penryhn is as well pleased with her as she was. There is less enthusiasm in her manner towards her; but still she seems to take it for granted that she will stay. I suspect that there is a feeling of compassion mixed up with this hospitality; for, selfish, and worldly, and untrue as Mrs. Penryhn is, she is by no means devoid of benevolence. The one rejoicing thought to me *now*, is that we hope to be at home the day after to-morrow. The freedom of one's own house will be an indescribable luxury; and I shall then be at the head-quarters of everything that is going on. I shall know the worst and the best of all that is happening, and shall understand just how far the servants' gossiping, and Mr. Randolph's misrepresentations, have been able to do me an injury. I wish Mrs. Bradshaw would write; but, I shall, as I trust, see her so soon, that I dare say she thinks it better to wait, and tell me everything, instead of writing. Charley is especially delighted at the thought of being in his own home again. He has felt greatly the claims upon my attention, which have prevented my being with him as much as I wished; and he is quite jealous of Celia and Stasey, because he says they take up his sisters' time. It is not bad discipline for him, though I would fain have it otherwise. Geoffrey Huddersfield has really been very kind to him; coming over frequently to see him, and amusing him by teaching him chess; but no one, he assures me, can take the place of Frank Neville. 'Such a capital fellow, mamma—a regular brick.' He happened to say this just as Mrs. Penryhn came in one day, and she asked whom he was speaking of? and I was obliged to answer quickly, 'one of his school-fellows,' and then turn the conversation. This having to guard against prejudices, takes away all sense of freedom. But I must go now, and prepare for

departure. When next I date my journal, I trust it will be from home. Still, I would not be ungrateful. I have received much outward attention myself, and the children have had real kindness. One must be just. It is so easy to say I dislike a person, and then to forget all the virtues which ought to go far to balance the faults, at least, to human eyes.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Dernham, January 10.—I doubt if ever I wrote a date with greater satisfaction. I take a long breath, and look round my room with the feeling of an escaped prisoner. The last day at Arling was really intolerable. I say, in all reverence and thankfulness, thank God it is over! It was only the day before yesterday, but it really seems to me a year ago. The Huddersfields came over to say good-bye,—that was the ostensible object. Mrs. Huddersfield and the two girls came early; Mr. Huddersfield and Geoffrey did not appear till dinner-time. I was very busy, superintending the packing, when I heard the first arrival, but I determined not to go downstairs till everything was finished; so I worked on diligently, till I was startled by a very gentle knock at the door—not at all like Mrs. Huddersfield's determined 'admit me!' but a timid, petitioning knock. I thought it was one of the children, and said 'come in,' without looking up.

'Dear Mrs. Anstruther, will you forgive me for intruding?' I heard uttered, in a gentle voice; and when I turned round, I saw Mrs. Randolph. She never appeared at breakfast, so I was not surprised to see her in a loose morning gown, and her hair not quite in that perfect order which it usually exhibits; but it did pain me to observe how very pale and worn she was, though looking extremely pretty. I was astonished at the visit, for this was the first time she had ever entered my room, but I could, of course,

only receive her kindly, and offer her a seat by the fire, which she accepted, with a look of suffering that went to my heart.

‘I am not very well this morning,’ she began; ‘I slept badly. Troubled thoughts always disturb rest.’

‘Yes,’ I said, ‘and the rest which does come when one is troubled, is scarcely refreshing.’

‘I want to ask your advice,’ she continued, abruptly.

‘Mine? but, indeed, Mrs. Penryhn must be your best adviser!’

‘I want your help. I trust you. God help me! I must have some one to trust.’

‘But let it be some one who can really help you, Mrs. Randolph,’ I said. ‘Indeed, I am too great a stranger.’

‘Then you cast me off! Well, I knew it would be so.’ She hid her face in her hands for some seconds. Suddenly looking up, she exclaimed, ‘They have all deceived me, that is why I come to you,—but you are selfish, like the rest!’

‘I hope not; but it is impossible for me to give advice in a case about which I am ignorant.’

‘A mere excuse! you are afraid to be mixed up with me!’

‘Yes,’ I said, ‘I am; the very little I have had to do with you has already brought me into trouble, and what is infinitely worse, it has brought trouble upon Ina too.’

‘How? Why? What can you mean?’

‘Mr. Randolph accuses us both of aiding you in a secret correspondence with Lady Chase.’

‘Fool! Madman! Miserable spy! And he thinks I will return to him!’

‘And you will not?’ I said.

‘Would you?’ and she fixed her glittering, restless eyes upon me, and leaned forward, resting her head upon her hand, and waiting for an answer.

I said, quietly, 'I would do what a wife's duty demands.'

'Duty! duty! Mrs. Penryhn talks of duty!' and Mrs. Randolph smiled scornfully.

'And she is right,' I said; 'there can be no other guide.'

'And each person is to judge of his own duty. Where is the guide, then?'

'There is a law,' I said, 'independent of opinion; only, unfortunately, we do not all interpret it aright.'

'The law which says a man may make a slave of his wife,—exact obedience of body and soul,—make her his tool,—insult her,—trample upon her!'

'A law which says they are one, for worse as well as for better,' I said.

'You talk ignorantly. You were a happy wife.'

'I could esteem my husband,' I said.

She interrupted me—'Yes, you esteemed him. I esteemed mine once. I thought him—ah! God only knows how I worshipped him. And now—'

'You esteem him still,' I said. 'Mr. Randolph is a man who in many ways must command esteem.' I felt a little hypocritical as I said this, for certainly it required some effort to recall Mr. Randolph's good qualities apart from those of which I had had personal experience.

'Well,' was the reply, and the tone singularly expressed both bitterness and candour, 'you are right. I have one longing, to despise him utterly, that so I may forget him. That has not come yet. But do you think, therefore, that I will go back to him?'

'Yes,' I said.

She waited, thought, then said slowly, 'This is not what Mrs. Penryhn counsels.'

'My dear Mrs. Randolph,' I exclaimed, 'it is impossible for any person to act rightly who has so many advisers.'

I do entreat you, choose one, and trust that one—you do but go by your own will when you consult so many;—Mrs. Penryhn, or, if you will, Mrs. Bradshaw.’

‘Mrs. Bradshaw! Ah, yes; but she is at Woodleigh, she cannot know how things have gone on.’

It was such a very weak answer, I really did not know how to reply.

‘Listen!’ exclaimed the unhappy woman, and her voice trembled with eagerness, ‘He would bring me back by threats. Unless I consent, he will take my child from me,—my Victor. I shall never see him again,—never—never. So he thinks to compel me. But I will dare him; yes, dare him to the very last.’

The pale cheek became crimson with excitement and fever. I said a few soothing words, but they sounded unmeaning. I was speaking of that of which I knew almost nothing; and all the time I was marvelling what could have induced her to appeal to me.

At length she said: ‘They told me you were very good, very wise. Marietta said so. I thought you would help me, but you can talk only of duty.’

‘Because duty must come first,’ I said: ‘it is God’s will. We must attend to that first; and comfort will follow.’

‘God’s will!’ she repeated,—and there came such a deep, deep sigh—‘but those like me know nothing about that. And why does He will I should be miserable?’

‘To bring you back to Himself,’ I said; ‘to make you feel that you have wandered away from Him, and that, apart from Him, there can be no true happiness. Dear Mrs. Randolph, if you could only do this first thing which God requires—submit yourself to your husband—you would feel that God was—if one may so say—on your side, and then you would look to Him with confidence for further guidance, and He would guide you. But now,

whilst you are a rebel—forgive me for using the word—it is impossible you should have any confidence in God, any more than in your fellow-creatures.’

‘I have confidence in you,’ she exclaimed. ‘But oh! I am so tired—so ill, so very miserable! Why does God make me miserable?’

The old question! I had made no way. I had done nothing for her. I did not see that anything was to be done. Reasoning with her was like attempting to build a house on the sand. I never before felt so strongly the difficulty of dealing with a person intellectually as well as morally weak.

‘Perhaps,’ I said, at length, ‘you would tell me precisely what it is that Mrs. Penryhn advises? Then I should be able to judge how far I can agree with her.’

‘She says I shall do better to delay; not to give any answer yet. She wants me to come here—that is, to take a cottage—the one at the corner near the church; then she says she shall be at hand to advise me, and she thinks she can make things straight with my husband after a time. Now, she says, if I go back to him, we must quarrel again, and everything will be worse than it was before. But he told me it must be now or never; and if I delay he will take Victor quite from me. I shall never see him again. Mrs. Penryhn says that is only a threat.’

‘And what do you yourself think is your duty?’

‘Don’t talk to me of duty; I can’t bear it. Talk to me of what I am able to do—to bear.’

‘But,’ I said, ‘we can all bear what it is our duty to bear, if we only seek God’s strength.’

‘I don’t feel that; I have never felt it. It is no use to speak to me in that way.’

‘Then,’ I said, ‘I really cannot give an opinion. If I must not put what is right before you, I have nothing else to say.’

‘But tell me what you think is right.’

‘Abstractedly,’ I said, ‘without any reference to circumstances, there is no question whatever that it is right to go back. I give no opinion as to whether, in your case, you should delay or do this at once. I really can be no judge; but the fact itself is self-evident.’

‘Ah!’—and she shook her head—‘that is no help. It tells me nothing.’

‘But what is it which you yourself wish?’ I asked.

‘I don’t know. I wish nothing; only to be at rest.’

‘And to have your child,’ I said.

‘Oh! yes. My Victor, my darling. But he will take him from me. I shall never see him.’

‘But Mr. Randolph will not do this if you submit yourself to him,’ I said.

‘He tells me I may see him sometimes.’

‘And you trust his word?’

‘Yes, yes, quite.’

The stress upon the last word made me feel what it was that had gained Mr. Randolph the respect of his friends, in spite of his glaring faults.

‘Then,’ I said, ‘the question becomes narrowed: it is just whether you will agree to give up your child or not.’

She burst into a violent flood of tears; and I heard her murmur, ‘Mrs. Penryhn does not say so.’

What could I reply? How could I take upon myself to advise more strongly, knowing as I did nothing of the reasons which must have induced Mrs. Penryhn to give different counsel?

‘She promises me it shall all come right,’ continued the unhappy woman, speaking in broken sentences; ‘and she has always helped me. I have trusted to her.’

‘But you told me, at first, that some one had deceived you,’ I said.

‘Yes; sometimes I think they are all deceiving me. Maria said her mother would write to my husband and get his consent; but she has not written. That has made me so miserable. I thought they were turning against me, and I came to talk to you.’

‘And when must you give your final answer?’ I enquired.

‘He did not say; he was so angry. He thought I had some dreadful reason for leaving Woodleigh before he came. But I had not—indeed I had not; only I was so frightened.’

‘And whilst you continue to do as you are doing,’ I said, ‘you must be more and more frightened.’

‘Yes, I know it; it would be better to be quite apart; but, then, my boy, my boy.’

‘And your husband,’ I said: ‘you could not really bear to be kept always and entirely separate.’

The only answer was a hysterical sob; and just at that moment, most unfortunately, Ina came in.

She would have drawn back, as soon as she saw how I was engaged; but Mrs. Randolph, with that singular impulsiveness which makes me think she must have some foreign blood in her, rushed up to her, exclaiming, ‘Ah! here is one, at least, who loves and is true to me.’ And Ina, half pleased and half bewildered, was led to a seat near the fire; and Mrs. Randolph was actually about to appeal to her as to the question under discussion, when I interfered.

I merely said: ‘Mrs. Randolph, these are not matters of which a young girl like Ina can be in the least a judge. Ina, my dear, you had better go.’ And Ina obeyed, feeling intensely curious, I am sure, by the way in which she lingered—so that I was obliged to speak to her twice.

That brought Mrs. Randolph’s excitement to a climax. I was her enemy: as unkind, as cruel, as the rest. I de-

nied her the only sympathy that was left. Marietta had deserted her; her husband hated her; the only person who spoke or thought of her kindly was Ina.

It was the same kind of scene which I had witnessed once before, and it ended in the same way.

Groves was sent for to assist Mrs. Randolph to her room; and then there was the usual dose of laudanum; and for the time she was quieted.

But not so the house. Mrs. Penryhn, of course, knew that something was amiss; so did Mrs. Huddersfield; and upstairs they both came. It was before Mrs. Randolph had left my room. They took the management of her instantly out of my hands, and made me stand by like an ignorant cipher, whilst they coaxed and petted and sympathised, and now and then, I must do them the justice to say, scolded.

But the real scolding was reserved for me afterwards. They heard Mrs. Randolph's version of what had passed—in one sense, a true one no doubt, but still only half true; because, not taking into account the reservations and limitations with which I had guarded all I said,—hinting advice rather than offering it. Anyhow they had, as I might have anticipated, a totally false impression of what I had said, and why I had said it; and came to me full of indignation at the attempt which they supposed I had made to guide Mrs. Randolph in a different direction from that which they had themselves suggested. They are both possessed by the idea that my one desire is to govern; and so they imagine that I have interfered in this poor woman's affairs, and taken upon myself to counsel her, simply from the love of interference. It is, I dare say, a natural idea, for I was obliged to be a little determined in one or two ways when the children were first given up to me; and Mrs. Penryhn has never forgiven me for declining to settle near Arling;

—and the prejudice once imbibed has ever since been retained.

But, be that as it may, I have not had such a complete set-down since the days when I was a naughty child in the nursery. I was told by Mrs. Penryhn, that with my love of management I had done irreparable mischief, not only on a former occasion, but in the present instance; that I had disturbed Mrs. Randolph's mind, just at the very moment when it was becoming settled and calmed; that the plan formed for her was the very best which could be devised under the circumstances; that immediate return to her husband would be nothing but misery for both; that everything would have been explained to Mr. Randolph's satisfaction; that a home near Arling would be a security against all the follies of which she had lately been guilty; that, in fact, it would be her salvation, for there were no friends she trusted like the old friends of her youth, who had been so faithful, so sympathising in all her troubles; and that she herself had said it was impossible to go back to Woodleigh,—she had been far too miserable and lonely there. The last words were spoken with a strong emphasis, and a glance at me, as if I had been the especial cause of the misery and loneliness; and then Mrs. Penryhn stopped, and Mrs. Huddersfield took up the task of enlarging upon her mother's text; and remarked on the folly, not to say the sin, of thus venturing to give advice upon unknown matters. She warned me against the love of power generally, and made most sensible observations upon the temptation which it offers to women,—in which I entirely agreed with her. She hinted (only hinted—what, she said, was by no means rude or unkind) at my peculiar position—left the uncontrolled guardian of my husband's children; and no doubt really meaning to do well, but still liable—as, indeed, all were liable—to error, especially

when there was any peculiar bias of mind, any special characteristic—such as the love of independence, an unwillingness to be guided, &c., &c. But it is impossible to remember it all; only it would have made a most excellent and valuable essay. And Mrs. Huddersfield spoke so well! She has a gift of words (some would say, a fatal gift for a woman); but, what is very rare, she keeps it under control. Every sentence is well turned, and full of meaning. She never repeats herself; and each syllable is enunciated in the clearest, fullest, most distinct tones. Really, if I had not been so excessively irritated, I could have listened to her with considerable amusement, if not interest. It was so peculiar to hear her say carefully, in her most excited moments, we do not, we will not, instead of we don't, and won't; and whither and thither, instead of where and there. I am convinced she watched herself more strictly than she would have done on any ordinary occasion, for I have now and then caught a sound of the objectionable abbreviations in ordinary conversations; but set her off upon a virtuous lecture, and a first-rate University orator would not be more exact in his language.

I will not answer for what my manner may have been whilst I was enduring this severe mental castigation; I dare say I showed that I did not like it, and I own that when Mrs. Huddersfield concluded by saying, 'these things are not pleasant to hear, but it does us all good at times to be told the truth,' I answered 'no doubt, only we must be quite sure that what we hear is truth.' A sentence which Mrs. Penryhn took up as if I had accused Mrs. Huddersfield of falsehood, and—but, in fact, it is all too painful and humiliating to be written down. I suppose no one ever came forth from an ordeal of this kind without having some cause for self-reproach; and I do not certainly recall all that I said with unmingled satis-

faction, though I don't think I actually lost my temper. We made it up, as people say, sufficiently to be civil to each other, but we had a most dreary evening; the only bright part of which was from six to seven, when the little ones were at play in the drawing-room. My bonnie little Essie is a delight to everyone, and Mrs. Penryhn is really excessively fond of children, and her prejudices seem to vanish where they are concerned.

Mrs. Randolph did not appear again. Ina was sent to her room several times by her grandmamma, a circumstance which, I confess, did not increase my good-humour. Celia and Stasey were loud in their regrets that their cousins were going away so soon, and before they had been allowed to pay them a visit. They tried very hard to make me promise that the two girls should go to them in the spring; but Mrs. Huddersfield cut them short, by saying in a virtuous tone—'My dears, it is wrong to look forward so far, and no doubt Mrs. Anstruther has her own plans, which it will be useless for you to interfere with. But if ever your cousins should be permitted to return to this neighbourhood, we shall be most glad to see them.'

'Won't you really let them come again, aunt Mary?' exclaimed Celia, coming up to me.

I could only say that I never ventured to promise long beforehand; and Mrs. Huddersfield made her comment in a marked manner—'Of course, my dear, I told you.'

That was the last worry of the evening, for the Huddersfields left us almost immediately afterwards; and we all went to bed. We started next morning at eleven, and were at home by three; Charley was a little tired, but all, except Ina, were delighted to find themselves here; and, even in her case, the prospect of seeing Marietta again, neutralized the regret at leaving Arling and Mrs. Randolph. After all, Ina's real feeling goes to

Marietta. Mrs. Randolph is only a romance to her ; but I trust they may not be thrown much together. We have done nothing at all but set ourselves to-rights, and prepare for regular work.

Mrs. Bradshaw has sent a note, saying that she has an engagement to-day, but hopes to see me to-morrow ; she will come to luncheon, that she may be sure to find me at home.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

January 12.—A day which has thrown light upon several subjects, not all of an agreeable character.

Mrs. Bradshaw came, as she had said, and I sent all the children down to the shore, with nurse as their *chaperone*, and having given orders that no other visitors were to be admitted, prepared for a long session. Marietta was left at home with Colonel and Mrs. George Bradshaw, and the children. With excellent caution Mrs. Bradshaw had decided that it would be better for Marietta and Ina not to meet until she had learnt from me how much Ina knew about the Woodleigh affairs; otherwise Marietta might mention, unintentionally, things which I did not wish Ina to know.

‘I am learning caution, my dear,’ said Mrs. Bradshaw, ‘but it is a difficult lesson. My first impulse always is to be out-spoken myself, and to let others be the same; but really I have suffered so much, and made others suffer too, that I am at length beginning to think twice before I speak once; and so I was resolved to hear all you had to tell before I allowed anyone else to have the opportunity of blundering.’

‘Which implies,’ I said, ‘that I am not to be cautious, but to tell you everything I have felt, said, and done.’

‘Everything you have done,—and as much as possible, what you have said. As to the feelings, I can imagine them. You have been in purgatory.’

‘Something very like it,’ I replied, ‘and the effect has been somewhat purgatorial. I hope it has done me a

great deal of good,—at any rate, it has been a lesson to my conceit. I am by no means a model step-mother, which you know I set out with being, at least in intention.'

'It is an ill wind that blows no one any good. It will be rejoicing news to the Dernham gossips, that a flaw has been found in that pattern of perfection, Mrs. Anstruther. But what were your offences at Arling? I know quite well what your Dernham follies have been.'

'They are all of the same character,' I said; 'but Arling worries, or offences, or whatever they should be called, are past; Dernham trials are present, and I would rather discuss them. What does the world say of me?'

'The most foolish question that a foolish mortal could ask! What would become of us if everyone knew what everyone said of him? My dear, hide your head in the sand, and be satisfied, "what the eye does not see, the heart does not grieve;" which is still more true of the ear and its hearing.'

'But one must see and hear sometimes,' I said; 'just to put one on one's guard. Have I any character left?'

'A little. The good rector would uphold you through thick and thin, if he were only not so greatly bent upon hearing both sides to every question; which puts him at the mercy of any gossip in the neighbourhood who professes to tell him something new. Lady Anson only says, 'I have never thoroughly approved of Mrs. Anstruther, but we must hope she has acted ignorantly;' whereupon virtuous Mrs. Harcourt draws herself up, and, in a half-aside, murmurs, 'Always charitable! dear Lady Anson. But remember your duty to your children.' What everyone else thinks or talks, I don't pretend to know; only the old Captain, holding up his hand, pronounces impressively "an excellent disciplinarian is Mrs. Anstruther. I can believe nothing against her."'

‘And do you really mean,’ I said, ‘that all these foolish people have been troubling themselves with my private affairs?’

‘Well! poor things, they have not much else to occupy them.’

‘But the impertinence,—the interference,—it really is too bad!’

‘Be patient, if you can;—consider what terrible things you have done. Not only allowed Ina to carry on this objectionable correspondence, but even to go to Lady Chase’s house! to call upon her! And then your running off to Arling, because you were afraid to meet Mr. Randolph, as you had been such a bad counsellor to his wife.’

‘You are talking wildly,’ I exclaimed, ‘it is quite impossible that such utter——’

‘Hush! hush! Don’t use strong language. The world may be a little mistaken, but it never tells lies. Oh! no. Such a good, watchful world it is—so anxious that its neighbours should not go wrong! And it really is very sorry for you. It hopes sincerely, that you will repent and amend. I know it prays very earnestly for you, and I am not at all sure that, if called upon, it would not subscribe handsomely to put you into a reformatory.’

‘Many thanks to it. And is this the general impression now?’

‘An impression,—but not quite a firm conviction, since I took upon myself to state exactly the extent of your delinquency. Mrs. Harcourt still thinks that it is a pity to allow so much liberty to young girls in their correspondence; and has considerable misgivings whether her saintly Lydia may not be corrupted by the near neighbourhood of your wilful Ina.’

‘She is right as far as the wilfulness goes,’ I said, with a sigh; ‘but it really is very trying.’

‘As trying as it was to the diver, who went to the bottom of the sea in a glass bell, to see all the ugly fish monsters crowding round him, and opening their jaws to devour him, though he knew they could not get at him. But the diver lacked a remedy which you possess; he could not draw down the blinds, and you can.’

‘I suppose,’ I said, ‘there is nothing to be done, but to be patient, and live it down.’

‘Nothing. Explanations too often make matters worse. I found that in one or two cases myself; so now I content myself with telling them they are uncharitable busybodies, and are talking of things they know nothing about.’

‘But I should like to know how all these rumours were set on foot, and at length were so exaggerated.’

‘Partly through the servants, partly through Mr. Randolph. He came back here from Arling, frantic against you, and declaring that you had tacitly acknowledged everything.’

‘It is quite monstrous,’ I exclaimed. ‘And he calls himself an honourable man?’

‘Oh, yes; “so are we all—all honourable men;” only when we are possessed with one idea, we arrive at rather strange conclusions. Tell me exactly what you did own to him.’

‘Nothing. I ran away from him.’

‘Most unwise. He is a man who only requires to have his tether given him, and then he will come round, and be quite tame.’

‘I was foolish, I confess. We had just one very short interview, and then he wrote me an impertinent note, requiring me to promise that I would give up all intercourse with his wife. Of course, I never answered it.’

‘Of course, you made a great blunder. He interpreted your silence to suit his own preconceptions; and is now more sure than ever that you have nothing to say for yourself.’

‘But, whatever he thinks, he need not talk,’ I said.

‘Talking is his mania; all the more, I think, because he has a kind of impediment in his speech, and finds it difficult. He must knock down an obstacle at all risks.’

‘And so he has been spreading these tales of me!’

‘Helping to spread them—doing his little possible; not maliciously, don’t think that, but from a stern sense of duty; because he deems it right to warn everyone against such a wicked impostor. He gives the main outline of facts; the startled and moral world adds the details.’

I must have looked greatly pained, for Mrs. Bradshaw changed her tone.

‘I have told you all this,’ she said, ‘rather in a random way: that is my fashion, perhaps not a good one. But, bad as it all is, things will improve. Falsehood is the hare; truth the tortoise. Wait long enough, and the tortoise will win the day. As I said before, explanations are of no use. Your own conduct will be your defence. And these unhappy Randolphs must leave the place soon, and then there will be an end of the whole concern; and by degrees, people will come to themselves.’

‘And where is Mr. Randolph going? and what is to become of his wife? She is very little inclined to go with him, wherever he may be.’

‘His idea is to take her abroad with him, upon certain conditions. She is to consent to part with Victor, who is to be sent to school, and to be with an uncle for the holidays; and she is not to ask to have him with her for more than a month in the year.’

‘He might arrange that,’ I said, ‘without making it a condition.’

‘Oh, but that is his way. He must always tell what he intends to do, and make a regular arrangement about it; and it is just this which has been the bone of contention between him and his wife for years. He might have

made her do anything he pleased, if he had not insisted upon her promising beforehand.'

'I suppose he thinks she spoils Victor.'

'Yes; and so far, he is right. Something must be done with the boy, or he will be entirely ruined. But, besides this, there is to be a pledge, that she will never write or speak to any person to whom her husband may object.'

'That, I suppose, is aimed at Lady Chase.'

'And all her set—German Barons, and so forth. A wise stipulation, but one, nevertheless, which a woman like Mrs. Randolph naturally shrinks from making.'

'And if she should make it, what then?'

'Why, then, she will be received back, as if nothing had been amiss. The debts will be paid, without anything more being said about them. She will have a handsome allowance. Her husband will treat her with all kindness; and, in short, they will live happy ever after.'

'There is nothing unreasonable in all this,' I said.

'But, unfortunately, Mrs. Randolph is not reasonable; and Marietta, who is in constant communication with her uncle, says he is in perfect despair.'

'The Arling tactics are working against him,' I said.
'Mrs. Penryhn supports the opposition.'

'Yes. Because she loves to manage and interfere, and have everything her own way, and thinks, that by standing out, she may compel Mr. Randolph to yield the question of stipulations and agreements. Little she knows of him! there is not a more pig-headed, obstinate, man in England,—and that is saying a great deal, for I have had a large experience of the race.'

'Then you would advise Mrs. Randolph to go back at all hazards?'

'I advise nothing, I wash my hands of the whole concern; Mrs. Penryhn has taken it up, and I resign.'

'And Marietta?'

'She stays with me, for the present,—rather against the grain, because, as you know, we don't absolutely harmonise; but I think she is beginning to understand me, and she makes great friends with my little merry, not over-wise, daughter-in-law. I don't know what is to be done with her, if her uncle and aunt can't make it up; for certainly Mr. Randolph will not allow her to go with his wife, neither will he take her to live with himself. He is so embittered by all this worry, that he has fallen into old-bachelor ways, and, except for his wife's sake, he will never break through them again.'

'It is a pity he ever ceased to be a bachelor,' I said. 'A fidgety, suspicious disposition like his must, under any circumstances, have made a woman miserable.'

'Oh, yes! If Government would only establish a committee of women to settle what men might marry and what might not! But we are living under the rule of that worst of tyrants—liberty,—and so we all are allowed, as somebody says, "to make ourselves miserable our own way."* I suppose you would not take Marietta yourself?'

'I! what an idea! She would not like it. There is no room for her. And the responsibility!—oh, no; it is impossible!'

'Well, I only asked because it came into my head one day, when I had been talking to her a little about the probable future, and she seemed so utterless homeless and lonely.'

'But think of Mr. Randolph. What would he say? Imagine his trusting his niece to such an utter reprobate as myself: the dear friend of Lady Chase!'

'I forgot that,—no,—it would not do. But it is a dreary prospect for her;—I wish, with all my heart, she would marry!'

* Miss Sinclair's Modern Accomplishments.

‘Mr. Anson?’

‘I am not so sure. Good-natured and pleasant he is, and having brains enough, for himself, though not many to spare. Marietta, though, would not want them. There would be no special reason against him; but then, there is nothing particular for him. No, I don’t think she must be Mrs. Anson!’

‘Mr. L’Estrange?’

‘Poor, dear rector! In spite of my mania for having him married, I am afraid it would be a sacrifice for her. He admires her in a vague kind of way, but he would not understand what a treasure he possessed; and she has a great sense of being appreciated; which arises, not exactly from vanity, but rather from an involuntary consciousness when persons are inferior to her. Besides, he is too old. No, Marietta’s husband may be on his way to her, but he has not yet arrived.’

‘We shall see,’ I said; ‘I very much question if she is indifferent to Mr. Anson.’

‘It will be sad to her if she is not, for he is to be sent abroad, to travel, for three years. The parental minds are uneasy about him, I suspect, and wish to divert his thoughts; so he and a friend, a Mr. Neville,—introduced by that most priggish of men, Mr. Digby,—are to start in the spring, and go the grand tour, which, in these days, includes Egypt and Jerusalem.’

‘Three years! What a long time it seems!’

‘And yet, what a short one it really is. Anyhow, one trembles to think what may be wrapped up in it.’

‘“The changes and chances of this mortal life!” But there is, after all, something restful in the words. They remind one that there are no chances, though there are changes, and so one is content to take events as they come.’

‘A very excellent little sermon! I hope I may profit by it. But—à propos to nothing—I meant to ask you if

you know anything about this Mr. Neville; for, certainly, he knows something about you, or, at least, your boy.'

'Does he? Then he must be a relation of Charley's friend Frank, and if so, a connection of the Penryhns too. A Miss Neville married Henry Penryhn, the one who went to Australia.'

'Oh, yes! I know; and there has been a family feud. I dined the other day at the Manor, and sat next to Mr. Neville at dinner; and, being perfect strangers, we set to work to discover mutual acquaintances; and then my friend told me something about it. He has a high opinion of you, and a very doubtful one of the Penryhns.'

'He won't keep his high opinion of me,' I said, 'if he takes my character from the report of the neighbourhood.'

'You are sore, I see; I should be the same in your place; but if you will only shut your eyes and stop your ears for a few months, the stories will blow over. And you may trust me to work for you behind your back.'

'But if Mr. Randolph should come down again, what am I to do? I really can't put myself in the way of being talked or written to in that insulting manner.'

'I don't see why you are to put yourself in any way of anything of the kind. Mr. Randolph will be at Woodleigh again very little—only just enough to arrange his affairs. And he hates the place and the people, and everything connected with it so cordially, that he is not likely to go beyond the grounds.'

'But he will talk—'

'Well! yes—he may; but my impression is, that he won't, simply because he has something else to think about.'

'But he will still retain the same impression of me.'

'Doubtless; and if you could show ever so plainly it was a wrong one, it would make no difference. He is a man who invents his own facts, and then draws logical

conclusions from them; and as he has acted upon these conclusions, and whatever he does must be right, you see it is impossible for the facts to be wrong.'

'And yet,' I exclaimed, 'people say he is high-minded and truthful; Marietta thinks him so—'

'And so he is in action, no one more so. But, unfortunately, the same principle which makes him keep to what he has promised, makes him keep to what he has said and thought. A man may be true in that way, according to his own conscience, without being just.'

'I don't acknowledge the possibility of truth,' I said, 'where there is no justice.'

'Spare me your metaphysics. I can't argue about these things, I can only see and feel them. Whatever Mr. Randolph tells me he has done or said, I believe. Whatever he tells me he will do or say, I believe. Whatever he says other people have done or said, I believe also, just so far as I can inquire into the context for myself.'

'Then you never take his conclusions?'

'Never. It is a satisfactory conviction to have arrived at, because one knows exactly where one stands. Marietta is coming to the same point, though by slow degrees. But tell me, now, what is to be the amount of confidence between her and Ina as to all these matters?'

'None; or at least none that can possibly be avoided. Ina only knows that Mr. Randolph has been displeased with his wife, and that she herself has been found fault with for sending letters for Mrs. Randolph. I did not choose to mix her up, more than I could help, with anything so disagreeable, and so I did not say half I might have said about her wilfulness and want of openness.'

Mrs. Bradshaw said, more gravely than usual, 'That is a pity.'

'Why do you say so?' I asked.

'Because I am afraid Ina may meet with awkwardnesses which she is not prepared for. People are so petty. The

Harcourts don't like her, because they don't like Marietta; and Ina is Marietta's friend, and so they have taken up all these ill-natured stories warmly. The rector, too, I know, thinks she has behaved very badly, and is likely to allude to the matter, if he should have anything to do with her Confirmation, as of course he will have.'

I sighed, and sank back in my chair, feeling quite weary and heart-sick.

'I am but a Job's comforter,' said Mrs. Bradshaw; 'but, I believe, I am doing the kindest thing by you, in putting you on your guard.'

'Yes; thank you much—but—I will think.'

'And don't make yourself ill by thinking; that will do no good to anyone. Trust to me to cut short the exaggerations and gossip. Now I must go, and Marietta shall come and see Ina to-morrow.'

I did not ask her to stay, for I really wanted to be by myself. I daresay I was too proud to show how very deeply wounded I felt by all this misrepresentation; and there is a little something in Mrs. Bradshaw's manner and tone which throws me back whenever I feel anything very much. She really is the most kind-hearted, warm friend imaginable,—true, and loyal, and energetic, and unselfish; but she just wants the sensitiveness of perception, which draws out confidence and gives a sense of sympathy. When she cuts me short, or puts disagreeable truths before me in her offhand way, I shrink into myself—jarred. It is only for the minute; but still, when that kind of thing is constantly repeated, it gives me a sense of unrest—of being put on the defensive.

And one thing strikes me in the way she talks of the children. She always makes me realise the difference between my own children and my step-children, which at other times I try to forget, and actually do forget. If Agnes had been in fault, Mrs. Bradshaw would have been

gentle in her manner of speaking,—really sympathetic; but because it is Ina, whom she does not thoroughly like, she speaks as if she was at liberty to say what she chose, and as if I should not care.

False relations again! The world never understands them—how should it? I don't believe, myself, that I should feel half as much about all this worry, if it were Agnes instead of Ina who had brought it on. The very fact of Ina's not being my own child makes me more sensitive about her. But there are some feelings which it is useless to express to anyone who has not experienced them.

CHAPTER XXXV.

January 14, Monday.—Yesterday was our first Sunday at home, and the first day we have been beyond the garden, or have seen anyone except Marietta, who came, as Mrs. Bradshaw had promised she should, but kept upon the surface of all things. She wanted us to go to the practising, as before; but I really was too busy, and declined, and I did not like the children to go alone. It is a relief, in one sense, to have had our first appearance in public over, but not in another. I was inclined to think Mrs. Bradshaw had been unwise in giving me any caution about the possible behaviour of my neighbours, but I have changed my mind. I should have been quite confounded, if I had not been in some measure prepared. Usually Lady Anson lingers purposely to speak to me after church, which I particularly dislike—more especially when she insists upon doing so after the Holy Communion service,—not understanding how much I wish then to be alone. Mr. Anson also has lately been quite marked in his attention. But to-day, after our absence, Lady Anson hurried past me with a bow, Mr. Anson looked quite shy; and as for the Harcourts, they scarcely noticed us at all, but seemed to be quite engrossed with Sir John, who really did not see us. Ina, quite unsuspecting, put out her hand, and was going to say something to Lydia Harcourt, when the young lady drew back, made a distant bend, and then walked on, leaving the poor child quite thunderstruck. The rector asked me how I was, and Captain Shaw shook hands; but,—whether it was my

fancy or not, I can't say,—they both certainly struck me as being grave and cold.

Ina was loud in her exclamations of surprise and indignation at dinner, but I could only turn the conversation then, and I had no opportunity of speaking to her in private till the evening—when all the others were gone to bed. As she was wishing me good night, I suggested that she should stay and have a little talk, and from her manner, I suspect she guessed that the subject would not be a very pleasant one. I had made up my mind to have no more reserve with her. Hateful as it is to open her eyes to the possibility of such a thing as an unhappy marriage and its miserable consequences, it is one which must, in all probability, be brought before her at some time or other; and I suspect it is best to act upon the suggestions which are given us by the events of life, and show young people what this world really is, not just at the moment which we may have thought best beforehand, but in that which Providence points out. One is often inclined to act in moral questions, as those persons do who will never have a fire till a certain day; and sit shivering and miserable in cold October, because they have resolved that they will not be comfortable till November. The rule may be a good rule in itself, only it puts aside the indications of external circumstances.

Anyhow, I felt that it would not do to let Ina be made irritated, and perplexed, and curious, by the behaviour of the Dernham people; and I was sure that, if I did not tell her the cause, some one else would. I have tried this forestalling of questions and curiosity with Agnes, in regard to other and more awkward subjects, and have always found it succeed. Whenever I have met with anything in books which I felt would be likely to set her mind working upon undesirable topics, with a wish to understand them, I have faced the subject at once; and,

without being asked, have given her the simplest and most matter-of-fact explanation I could, in the most direct form; and so I think I have managed to keep her from any peculiar interest or excitement about things which would be likely to do her harm. One of Ina's strong points being curiosity, it is more particularly needful to be on one's guard with her.

I entered upon the subject without preface, and said that I wanted to tell her the reason of the strange behaviour which had so annoyed her. Unfortunately, there were some very untrue reports going about concerning both herself and me. I had alluded to them when we had our conversation at Arling. They were greatly exaggerated, but still people believed them, and, therefore, they were cold to us.

'But, mamma, mamma!' she exclaimed, 'what business can people have to interfere? What can they know? And about you, of all persons! Oh! it is so cruel, so false, so wicked! I wish never to speak to any of them again. Lydia Harcourt is a horror—I always thought her so.'

'Stop! dear child,' I said, 'you are doing precisely the same thing for which you find fault with others, judging without knowing. The reports are very untrue and exaggerated; but, having heard them, and believing them, it is not at all to be wondered at that persons act upon them.'

'But, mamma, what reports?—what can they say?—I did nothing but send a few notes and messages for Mrs. Randolph, and I was wrong—please don't think I excuse myself—but how can that be such a great matter?'

'Because,' I said, 'there was some intercourse—that is not quite the right word, but I don't know what other to use—between yourself and Lady Chase. Now, Lady Chase is a woman who forsook her husband, and has since

been separated from him, which is a most terrible and public disgrace ; and, instead of living quietly in retirement, she has taken a house in Westford, and surrounds herself with persons of various kinds, who are very disreputable, and make themselves notorious for bad conduct of many kinds. The slightest correspondence or communication passing between you, or any young girl, and Lady Chase must, if known, give people a bad opinion of you ; and then naturally they think and speak worse of me, because they say I ought to have prevented it. Do you see this ?

‘Yes,’ replied Ina, hesitatingly ; ‘but it was Mrs. Randolph——’

‘Precisely,’ I said, interrupting her ; ‘and the very fact that Mrs. Randolph could bring you into such a difficulty, will account for my objection to your intimacy with her. Mrs. Randolph herself has been very imprudent in this matter. She has made her husband extremely angry by keeping up an acquaintance with Lady Chase ; and whether they will ever be reconciled again is doubtful. You see, darling, these are very serious matters. You have been playing with edged tools, and you have been wounded.’

‘I should not care for myself,’ exclaimed Ina, half proudly, half sorrowfully ; ‘but for you—it is scandalous that people should behave so.’

‘Nay, Ina, I can’t quite agree with you there. The exaggeration of the report is one thing, which I own, is unfair and unjust ; but, supposing it to be true, then I should not quarrel with the Dernham people at all for cutting us.’

‘Cutting us ! Oh, mamma, they would never venture to do that !’

‘Something very near it, and I confess they would be justified. There must be such a thing as public cen-

sure, or society would become utterly corrupt. What should you say, if thieves and murderers were admitted into society on the same footing as honourable men ?

‘I see; but, mamma, Mrs. Randolph is not like Lady Chase.’

‘God forbid she should be! But, Ina, if Mrs. Randolph persists in associating with Lady Chase, the natural inference is, that she does not disapprove of her; and the probability is, that she may some day follow her example. And, however severe, and even uncharitable the world may be, it is infinitely better for us all that it should be so, than if it were to look leniently upon these things. We none of us know how much we are upheld in doing right by the thought of what our fellow-creatures will say of us.’

‘But I thought we were not to care for the opinion of the world?’ continued Ina, rather pertinaciously.

‘We are not to care for it when it is opposed to God’s law; but when it is in accordance with it, then it is, in fact, God’s voice speaking to us, in the way we are most likely to feel and understand. And God has said to us most plainly, “Abstain from all appearance of evil.” It can never be safe, Ina, to disregard this injunction.’

‘But grandmamma and aunt Maria—’ again began Ina.

‘They neither of them fully know the facts of the case, and, so far as they do know them, they quite agree that Mrs. Randolph is very unwise, and that the slightest communication between you and Lady Chase is a thing not to be tolerated for a moment. But then they say, as the world says, why did not I prevent it? and so, Ina, the blame falls back upon me.’

I think tears were in my eyes as I spoke, for the thought of all the injustice I was suffering from came over me bitterly at the moment. Ina turned to me with great tenderness of manner, and exclaimed, ‘Mamma, I shall

never forgive myself. Oh! if I could only bear it all alone!

‘I should not care,’ I said; ‘I could even be thankful, dear child, to bear double the reproach, if I could be certain that you would take the warning to heart. It may be such a lesson for life, Ina.’

‘Yes, if such things are likely to happen again,’ said Ina; ‘but all people are not gossips and scandal-mongers like the Dernham people. I don’t think there can be anyone else who would behave as Lydia Harcourt did to-day.’

‘The world is very much alike everywhere,’ was my reply; ‘and Lydia Harcourt only did what she saw others doing.’

‘I detest her,’ murmured Ina.—‘But, mamma, I don’t think it is possible such things should happen again.’

‘Not precisely the same, but others very similar may; and Ina, if you will judge for yourself, you must get into difficulties; if you won’t take my experience, you must purchase your own, and a very bitter one it will be for yourself and everyone about you.’

‘Dear mamma, please don’t speak so: indeed I will try, but I could not possibly have foreseen all this fuss; I meant no harm.’

‘If you had trusted to me and obeyed me, all this would not have happened. You meant only to evade the spirit of my wishes, and to go your own way. It is just what I have said to you before: there is a want of perfect straightforwardness about you; you are not quite honest with yourself, or with anyone else. I can’t say anything more about it, I am too tired and fretted; I can only trust that you will take it all to heart.’

‘I must take it to heart if it makes you unhappy, mamma,’ exclaimed Ina, bursting into tears. ‘But those dreadful people, what can be done about them?’

‘Nothing,’ I said; ‘we must take no notice, and trust to time to set things right.’

‘If we could only leave the place,’ said Ina. ‘I never have liked it very much, and we might go near Arling; it would be so delightful to be close to grandmamma.’

Daggers at my heart again! but I only said, ‘My love, the more people say against us the more reason there is to remain where we are, and prove to them that they are mistaken. We must be patient. And now good night; I trust to you to say nothing to Cecil, or to anyone.’

‘Not to Marietta?’

I hesitated. Then I felt that I must give her a safety valve, and I said, ‘Yes, you may talk to Marietta.’

CHAPTER XXXVI.

January 16.—I have arranged with the rector that Ina and Cecil should go to him twice a week, for Confirmation instruction. There are to be regular classes at first, and then he told me he should wish to see them separately; he asked me in an awkward way whether I had anything particular to say about them. I had a great deal, but I was not quite sure that he was the person I should choose to be confidential with upon such subjects; and I paused, and I dare say looked uncomfortable, and so did he.

Then, merely for the sake of saying something, I observed that I did not think they were more faulty than other girls of their age.

‘I am sorry you should take such a low standard,’ he replied, very gravely. ‘The Bible speaks differently: it says—“be ye therefore perfect.”’

‘Oh, yes. But I am speaking of faults, not of aims. I hope and think they both wish very earnestly to do what is right, Cecil especially.’

‘But that is not all; there must be a principle in the heart—true love to God.’

‘I hope I see the dawning of it,’ was my reply, ‘but girls of their age are very reserved.’

‘Surely not with their mother!’

‘You forget,’ I said, ‘Mr. L’Estrange; I am not their mother; and, even if I were, I am afraid experience proves that there is a great deal of reserve between mothers and daughters; especially upon this subject of religion.’

'It ought not to be,' he said; 'there must be something wrong in such a case.'

So like an old bachelor; knowing nothing of girls' minds, and judging everything by theory! But I did not exactly contradict him, I merely said—'minds are so differently constituted, they cannot always suit.'

'No, perhaps not; and you have no fault, then, to find with these young ladies?'

'Well,' I replied, with a smile, 'that is going rather too far; Ina likes to have her own way, and Cecil is thoughtless, and has a quick temper.'

'And there is nothing more—nothing particular, which would distress you, make you anxious?'

He looked at me so sternly with those keen grey eyes of his, that I began to feel somewhat as if I was confronted with the Grand Inquisitor.

'Nothing very particular, except'—and I paused.

The rector still looked at me fixedly, without speaking. The steady gaze troubled, and even irritated me, so that it took away my power of thought, and acting upon the impulse of the moment, I said abruptly; 'Mr. L'Estrange, have you any special reason for questioning me in this way?'

He coloured up to the temples: 'I—really—it is a very awkward question; I think, Mrs. Anstruther, you must be aware—'

'Of what?'

'Of the remarks, the unpleasant observations—'

'Oh yes,' I said, 'quite aware; but what of them?'

He regarded me in amazement: 'Surely a lady must feel that such things are of consequence.'

'Of great consequence,' I said, 'always supposing they are true, or rather based on truth; but as these happen to rest upon gross exaggeration of very simple facts, I really have no intention of troubling myself about them.'

‘But may I be allowed to contradict them?’

‘I think not,’ I said, and the poor man nearly rushed from his chair in surprise.

‘I leave it to Mrs. Bradshaw to say all that is to be said,’ I continued. ‘I do not think it advisable to have two defenders, though, no doubt, both would be very kind. I believe myself, that reports which have been exaggerated often dwindle away more quickly, if left to themselves, than if discussed and explained.’

‘But there is a foundation for them,’ he said, gravely.

‘Certainly, there is a foundation for most things which the world says. Ina did twice, unknown to me, send a little message from Mrs. Randolph to Lady Chase, and she received and forwarded messages. It was wrong, because I was not told of it, but that was all. Ina knew nothing, could know nothing about Lady Chase. Marietta herself—’

He interrupted me. ‘Miss Randolph—Madam—Mrs. Anstruther, I entreat that her name may not be mixed up.’

‘Pardon me,’ I said, ‘I must beg to be allowed to finish my sentence. Marietta herself cannot be more innocent of intentionally having any communication with Lady Chase; and yet we both know that she has been forced to speak to her.’

‘Yes, I know it. I remember—’ and a look of pain came over his face—and he was silent.

‘But,’ I continued, ‘Marietta could be no more tainted by that accidental association, than an angel could.’

‘No,’ he said, quickly, ‘no; we won’t speak of it.’

‘Pardon me again,’ I said, ‘but we must speak. Perhaps the best testimony to Ina’s simplicity and purity of character, Mr. L’Estrange, is Marietta’s love for her.’

‘Yes, indeed. I had not thought of that.’

‘I don’t want to mislead you,’ I continued, ‘and since

you have forced this subject upon me, I will be quite open. I have great fault to find with Ina for wilfulness, and for an absence of straightforwardness,—but this is all. As for myself, the world may say just what it pleases; it will talk for a few weeks, and then something else will happen, and I shall be forgotten. I really cannot bring myself to say to anyone but you—that I have no connection whatever with Lady Chase; and that as for allowing anything like friendly intercourse between her and my children, I would cut off my right hand first.'

'Thank you,' he said; 'I am relieved.'

I could not find it in my heart to be grateful to him; I was so vexed that he should have had any misgiving, but it was very natural. He went on, really quite easily and cordially.

'I suppose I shall do well to allude to these faults, when I talk to your daughter?'

'I beg you will do whatever you think best,' I said.

'I regret having displeased you,' began the rector.

'Not displeased, not in the least; I could not be displeased, but I am pained. It is a human infirmity; if you leave me to myself, it will all be right.'

'I should not have thought of speaking to you,' he continued, rather persistently, 'but for two reasons: one because of the Confirmation, and the other because—' his voice changed and he paused—'because of Miss Randolph. I think it is not likely she will remain long with Mrs. Bradshaw; do you?'

'No,' I said, 'I understood it was only a temporary arrangement. But I do not quite understand what this has to do with the subject we were speaking of.'

He went on: 'And they do not suit. Mrs. Bradshaw is most worthy, very excellent. She has assisted me during your absence, and I desire on no account to say anything against her.'

‘Only that she does not quite please Marietta,’ I said. ‘They are uncongenial. I cannot flatter myself that the home would be happy.’

‘But, indeed,’ I exclaimed, ‘no one, that I am aware of, ever thought of it as Marietta’s home. I imagined of course, she would be either with her uncle or aunt, or both, whenever these unfortunate differences were terminated.’

‘But they may not terminate for some time,’ said the rector; and as he spoke, something in his voice struck me as unusual; and I turned to him and saw a strange look of nervous agitation in his face, though it was gone almost immediately.

‘We shall be very sorry to lose her,’ I said. ‘Ina and Cecil will be, especially.’

‘And you?’

‘For Marietta’s own sake I shall regret it, perhaps, more than any one. She attracts me singularly. For the sake of past associations, I shall be relieved. I desire to forget them utterly.’

‘And nothing would induce you to keep her with you?’

‘I don’t understand. How can she remain with me?’

‘She must not stay with Mrs. Randolph,’ said the rector, ‘at least, under present circumstances. Mrs. Anstruther, would you expose your own children to such society as there has been at Woodleigh lately?’

‘Not for worlds,’ I said. ‘But Marietta was placed there by her uncle, and has gone through the ordeal marvellously well.’

‘Mr. Randolph did not know then how great the evils were,’ said the rector. ‘I have myself told him of things which have opened his eyes. He desires to find another home for his niece.’

‘But she lived with him formerly,’ I said

‘For a short time,—never as a permanence—and she does not wish it now,—neither does he.’

‘And you desire,’ I said, ‘that I should take Marietta into my house?’

‘Would it be asking too much? It seems like a liberty; but you will remember that I am not making the request for myself.’

In my own mind, I a little doubted the truth of this assertion, though I am convinced the rector made it in perfect good faith. I replied, ‘It is useless to discuss whether I would or would not, Mr. L’Estrange, because it is perfectly certain that Mr. Randolph would never consent to it. Besides, are we not talking of things which don’t concern us?’

‘I have been commissioned to look out for a home for Miss Randolph,’ he answered. ‘I am not accustomed to interfere unasked in my neighbour’s affairs.’

‘I beg your pardon—but my other objection remains——’

‘In a measure—but——’

He looked so confused, that I felt obliged to come to his assistance. ‘Pray speak plainly,’ I said. ‘I promise you not to be annoyed or offended.’

‘Mr. Randolph arrives at conclusions very rapidly, but he is open to conviction,’ said the rector.

‘And if you can convince him that I am not the imprudent person he thinks me, he will perhaps do me the honour to ask me to take charge of his niece. But, Mr. L’Estrange, I am afraid that convincing and converting Mr. Randolph is a task I don’t feel inclined to attempt, especially considering what my last communication from him was.’ And I related the history of our interview, and Mr. Randolph’s very remarkable note.

The rector looked confounded. ‘You see,’ I continued, ‘that, after this, it is out of the question for Mr. Ran-

dolph and myself to come to any amicable arrangement about Marietta, unless he will consent to retract, and make me an apology.'

'Undoubtedly.'

'And Mr. Randolph will not do that.'

The rector considered a little, then he said, 'But if he were to do it, it would be the quickest way of stopping all these uncomfortable reports.'

'Really, Mr. L'Estrange,' I said, 'my friends are much more troubled at them than I am, and more impatient to stop them. Under God's blessing, I have entire confidence in time, and my own conduct, to get rid of any reports.'

'No doubt; yet they are injurious,—and for your daughters, especially.'

I was reproved, for I had spoken selfishly. 'Yes, for the children's sake, it must be very needful to set oneself right in the eyes of the neighbourhood,' I said. 'You are right there. But there is nothing to be done with Mr. Randolph.'

'I do not feel certain on that point,' was the reply.

'And, even if anything were done,' I said, 'it must be quite independent of the idea of my taking charge of Marietta. I don't see my way to that in the least.'

'But you do not say no?'

'Not absolutely,—but very nearly.'

'You will think of it?'

'Yes,—I will.'

'And you will pray to be guided? for it will be a very important decision. Good morning.'

I liked his pastoral admonition—it was so earnest; and we shook hands warmly. But the pertinacious man could not resist adding, at the very last, 'You will not say, no, without having well considered the question?'

To which,—liking, of course, to have the last word,—I answered, 'The question has to be asked first.'

CHAPTER XXXVII.

January 17.—The two girls have attended the Confirmation class to-day. I was anxious to know how they would get on, and what kind of impression the rector's teaching would make upon them. He is practical and methodical,—that I supposed he would be; but I was afraid he would be dry, and that his quaintness would touch their sense of the ludicrous. But the great blessing of real earnestness is, that it carries everything before it; and, though Cecil informed me that he said one or two rather strange things; and Ina added, that he talked about St. Augustine and St. Chrysostom as if they had been his personal friends, and ought to be hers too; yet I could see that the effect of the teaching was impressive and elevating. They have written questions to answer, which alarm them very much, especially, as he required them to promise that they would not ask me to help them. They can scarcely be as alarmed as I am, though, for I have a misgiving that they will quite disgrace themselves. They are not quick at composition, and Cecil continually fails to see the point of the questions put to her; and these are just what they should not be,—rather learned, and very vague. I could bring out the girls' knowledge very well, if I might examine them myself; but I can imagine their exhibiting themselves as complete ignoramuses when the rector's questions are to be answered. But one must leave this. It is one of the trials of teaching, that the blunders of the pupil are

attributed to the person who instructs ; and I don't see why I am to be exempted from the common lot of all.

Marietta was here yesterday, and Ina and she had a long walk and talk in the garden, and when they came in Ina looked more really grave and thoughtful than I have seen her for a long time. Marietta came up to my room afterwards, and told me that she was afraid she had made her very sad, because she had been repeating to her what Mr. Randolph said about me when he came back to Woodleigh the other day, 'and it would not have been, I told her,' said Marietta, 'if she had not kept everything to herself. Dear Mrs. Anstruther, you understand, I could not hide anything from you—except the family's sad troubles, those which I must not talk of;—and I do wish, oh, I wish so very very much, that Ina could feel the same !'

I felt a little perversely inclined to excuse Ina. 'Your temperament is different from hers,' I said; 'you are, naturally, more confiding.'

'I don't quite see, or understand. What is temperament?'

I laughed. 'A difficult question, my dear; I won't undertake to give you a philosophical answer, but it is like the grounding in worsted work, which sets off the whole, and makes it either dark or light. Yours is an impulsive temperament, and you trust easily; Ina's is slower, and more cautious, and so she is a little inclined to be suspicious.'

'I can't suspect,' said Marietta, thoughtfully; 'it makes me so miserable. My uncle has talked to me sometimes, and then I have said,—"if you will find out the truth, I will think as you wish me; but I cannot bear the doubting, and so I put it away." He was angry because I had not found out that there were mysteries between Ina and aunt Julia; but how could I suppose anything was

wrong? And as for you, dear Mrs. Anstruther, I could sooner suspect the rector.'

'Thank you, my dear,' I said, laughing; 'I know that is the highest praise you could give me.'

'He is so very kind to me,' continued Marietta; 'it makes me wonder why. Only he knew my father. And Mrs. Bradshaw is very kind, too, and everyone,—but,' and she turned to me, 'I think I trust you most.'

'Dear child, you cannot trust me too much, if you mean that you feel sure I wish to help you.'

'I feel quite sure—quite, quite.' Her look of intensely simple, childlike confidence, went to my heart. She was sitting on a low stool, as she so often does, and, when I bent down and kissed her, she caught hold of my hand, and murmured, 'So very dear!' and the lovely deep dark eyes glistened, as she added, 'Oh! I do love you.'

How I longed to say, 'Love me and live with me,' but I dared not. We sat silent for some seconds, and at last I said, 'You are at least comfortable now?'

'Yes, I am comfortable, but I am not happy. It is no one's fault; but I cannot talk of the things I care for; I laugh and sing with Marion Bradshaw, and I play with the children; but I talk to Ina and to you.'

'And not to Mrs. Bradshaw?'

'Why do I not love Mrs. Bradshaw?' she exclaimed; 'it makes me unhappy, because it is ungrateful. She has done so much for me; but the things she says come out suddenly, and seem to frighten me; and I am like a child to her; I cannot contradict or oppose her, for she laughs; and I am sure she must know best, but I cannot feel it. It is not quietness to be with her.'

'No,' I said, 'certainly, it is not quietness; but you will like Mrs. Bradshaw more and more.'

'But I cannot live with her,' exclaimed Marietta eagerly.

‘I don’t imagine it has ever been thought of,’ I said.

‘Oh! dear Mrs. Anstruther, you think me so cold and so forgetful; but, indeed, it is not that. But if I must not live with people my heart goes out to, then I will pray God that I may live alone.’

‘You are too young for that, dear child,’ I said.

‘Surely not; I could be so careful. I could be in a house where there were others, only they should not interfere with me. That is what my plan is.’

‘The world would not understand,’ I said.

‘Ah! the world. I would wish to know what the world means.’

‘It is a very vague and abstract kind of creature, I know,’ was my reply, ‘but still it has an existence; and, except when duty calls us to oppose it, we shall always be unwise in setting it at defiance.’

‘I would not defy any,’ exclaimed Marietta. ‘I would be so quiet, so shut up; no one should see me or know me. I would only live to do some good.’

‘When God calls you, and points out the way,’ I said; ‘till then, my child, you must wait; and the waiting will be training.’

‘But is not having the feeling a call?’ exclaimed Marietta. ‘I have not the wishes which some have. I would desire no riches and no rank; I would ask only for a little love,—a true love;—and something which I may take with me in my hand when I die, and offer to my God, and say that it has been done to show my thankfulness to Him.’

‘And when the opportunity for this something presents itself,’ I said, ‘I don’t think you will find Mrs. Bradshaw, or myself, or any of your friends standing in the way of it. But the question to be first considered is,—what is to be done at the present moment? You will not, I imagine, return to Mrs. Randolph?’

‘Not unless she goes back to my uncle; then it will be all right.’

‘And what,’ I asked, ‘is the probability of that?’

Marietta looked surprised, as she said, ‘You know better than I do, you have been at Arling.’

‘But I do not know all that is said and done at Arling,’ I replied.

‘But Ina knows; she told me that my uncle made very hard conditions, and that they would not be accepted.’

This really was too trying,—the idea of Mrs. Penryhn’s having made a mere child like Ina her confidant in such matters! What will she do next?

But I made no remark to Marietta, and only said, ‘Mrs. Bradshaw has told me something of this.’

‘Aunt Julia must be guided by some one,’ continued Marietta, ‘and she leans on Mrs. Penryhn. But I don’t think anyone who really loved her would give her that advice.—I mean, to say, no, to my uncle’s conditions,—for I am sure they are the last he will make. And then she will be left quite to herself, or to Lady Chase, who tries still, I know, to get hold of her. Only yesterday, I saw a servant of hers stop at the Woodleigh Lodge.’

‘What can she want now of Mrs. Randolph?’ I inquired.

‘She would desire my poor aunt to go abroad with her, and live with her. Because, you see, my aunt will have some money, anyhow; and Lady Chase has none. It will come to that,—it must,—if aunt Julia will not go back to my uncle; and it makes me—oh, so sad, to think of!’

‘Yes,’ I said, ‘it would be little short of madness, but thinking of it can do no good except to make you unhappy. We must all pray and trust that your poor aunt may have wise counsellors.’

‘And follow them,’ said Marietta, ‘not only for now, but for always—she does change so.’

‘And if she should follow them, then your path will be clear,’ I said; ‘you will go back to your uncle, and have a home with him and his wife.’

‘Oh yes, but if not?’

‘You must not think about it.’

‘I try not; only it is so lonely, and when I leave Dernham I shall leave what I love best.’

‘You will come back to us, dear child,’ I said; ‘I shall always manage to find some corner for you.’

‘Anything, any place; if you did but know! Dernham has been so happy; all but the troubles at Woodleigh.’

‘It is a pleasant neighbourhood upon the whole,’ I said, ‘though just now it is a little hard upon me; but I can easily forgive the misunderstanding. Lady Anson is really a kind-hearted woman.’

‘She can look very unkind,’ said Marietta quickly; ‘I don’t want to come back and see her.’

‘When did she look so, my dear?’ I asked, with some curiosity.

‘When you were away; she came in at a practising in church, and then she looked;’ and Marietta coloured crimson, as she added, ‘Mr. Anson was holding my book; she did not like it. I am glad he is gone. She will never look so again.’

‘It may have been well,’ I said; ‘people will gossip, and Mr. Anson, like all young men, is pleased to make himself at home with the young ladies he meets.’

‘He will never be at home again with me,’ said Marietta. ‘But he thinks me strange and changeable, and he told me so.’

‘And what did he say?’

‘I told him that I did not change in mind ever.’

‘But my love,’ I exclaimed, ‘surely that was rather a strong expression.’

‘Was it? I don’t know,’ said Marietta quietly. ‘It was truth.’

‘But what did it mean? That you would always like him?’

‘Oh yes, he is very pleasant.’

‘Take care he does not think you consider him something more than very pleasant,’ I said.

‘I cannot help what he thinks,’ exclaimed Marietta. ‘He is going away, and it will not signify.’

‘But, if he were to stay and you were to stay, what then?’

‘I could not change,’ was the reply. ‘I should like him always; but I would not let him talk to me, or look over the book, because of Lady Anson. There would be no harm in anything then—would there be?’

‘Only that English reserve is very likely to misconstrue Italian openness,’ I said.

‘Yes, I know you are right,’ replied Marietta, in a fascinating tone of candour and simplicity—‘I am not English—I will try to learn it.’

‘No, I entreat you,’ I exclaimed, laughing, ‘don’t try to learn anything. Be yourself, for your friends will never love anything else half as well. Only, as a rule, don’t talk about personal feelings to any but your women friends; and just avoid any particular attentions from Mr. Anson or any other gentleman. Such things may mean nothing in Italy, but they are supposed to mean a great deal in England, and so people gossip and are ill-natured about them.’

‘Ah! yes, they are ill-natured,’ said Marietta, with a sigh,—‘all but you and Ina.’

‘And Mrs. Bradshaw?’

‘Dear Mrs. Bradshaw, she is very, very good to me. But I don’t think she was ever in Italy.’

We both laughed, and Marietta ran off, saying that Ina was wanting her. I don't know whether the conversation did any good. I am afraid not. It is so difficult to infuse caution into a mind so absolutely simple and unsuspecting as Marietta's. And as to learning to be English—she may live a thousand years and she will never be that, at least in manner, though, in some respects, she is singularly so in mind. I should like to know whether the probability of her living here with me ever entered her head. I am tolerably certain, from what she said, that she would rejoice at it; not quite certain though, for one so often finds that, deep down in the corner of a person's mind, there is some fidget or crochet which interferes with the plan that seemed exactly what was needed. One certainty I have gained by our conversation, Marietta is heart-whole, whatever Mr. Anson may be.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

January 19.—A visit from Captain Shaw. I shall learn easily enough to distinguish my friends from my enemies; a more important piece of knowledge than one is apt to imagine when one sets out in life. He is the only person, except the rector, who has called on me since my return. The good old man was really paternal in his interest, but so quaintly cautious and courteous! We began upon all common topics,—the weather, and his fishing expedition, and Mr. Anson's departure, and change in general, till we reached—what he was evidently aiming at—change in particular, Woodleigh and the Randolphs. I really grow weary of the name, but Captain Shaw told me one thing which I was very glad to hear; and seemed surprised, and even relieved, when he found that I was quite ignorant of it. Lady Chase intends soon to leave Westford, and go to Paris. That the movements of such a woman should, even in the most remote degree, affect me, wounds my self-respect (I hope the feeling is not wrong), and I could not help saying, decidedly, 'Lady Chase!—Oh! yes, I have heard of her; but, really, I know very little about her, and care nothing, except as one is bound to care for all persons who have chosen the wrong road in life.'

'I rejoice to hear you say so, my dear madam; yes, it is indeed the wrong road, and Lady Chase's example has, I fear, been most mischievous in its effects upon our poor friend Mrs. Randolph. I assured her husband, when we had a long conversation together, that you

took the same view of the intimacy that he did. I ventured to state this, without previous communication with you, but only from my knowledge of your character.'

'Thank you, very heartily,' I said; and as I held out my hand to him, he raised it to his lips, and just at that moment Mrs. Bradshaw, who had entered the garden by the little gate, crossed the path in front of the drawing-room window, and glanced into the room. Immediately afterwards I heard her knock at the door.

The maliciously amazed expression of her face, when she came into the room, very nearly upset my gravity; and the old Captain must have thought me scarcely in my right mind as I said a few words of welcome, and then stopped, with an almost uncontrollable inclination to laugh, and went on with something quite incoherent. He himself was as solemnly polite as usual, and Mrs. Bradshaw humoured him delightfully. She turned away from me, and addressed herself to him, apologising with a perfectly grave face, for having interrupted, what she felt quite sure was, a most important *tête-à-tête*.

'Yes, dear madam, important in one sense. The mutual understanding of friends must always be a matter of importance.'

'I really ought not to have come in,' exclaimed Mrs. Bradshaw; 'I had a misgiving, a twinge of conscience, when I looked in at the window. But you know, my dear sir, we are frail mortals; at least, I answer for myself. The twinge was not strong enough to overcome my wish to see Mrs. Anstruther.'

'A natural wish, dear madam; one which I perfectly comprehend.'

'I knew you would sympathise with it,' she continued. 'But pray don't let me interrupt you. My dear,' and she turned to me, 'let me go into the garden, and walk up and

down in front of the window till you are ready for me. I shall make a capital sentinel.'

'But there is no need,' exclaimed the Captain; 'I was only saying——'

'Oh! pardon me. I have not the slightest wish to inquire what you were saying; it could be no concern of mine.'

'Captain Shaw is a very kind friend,' I said, gravely, and feeling half provoked with Mrs. Bradshaw's nonsense. 'He has greater trust in me than the rest of the Dernham world have.'

'He has unbounded trust in you,' continued Mrs. Bradshaw. 'Now confess, my dear Captain, is not Mrs. Anstruther, in your eyes, a model woman?'

'I, really—I——'

'The fact is, Captain Shaw has never formed for himself any model,' I began; but the old man stopped me.

'Dear lady, forgive me; once, years ago—I was young then, thoughtless, it may be—but I had feelings—tender feelings; and there is an image—it never was more than an image, but it lies enshrined, it is a treasure—you will spare me the recollection, I am sure.'

'Of course,' I exclaimed, hastily, for I was really afraid how far Mrs. Bradshaw might carry her love of bantering; and with all the old Captain's peculiarity, there is something about him which makes me especially dislike to hear him turned into ridicule. 'We were talking of Woodleigh,' I continued.

'And I come with news about it,' said Mrs. Bradshaw. 'It is to be sold.'

'I am thankful,' I exclaimed.

'Mr. Randolph comes down to-morrow, to settle some business matters connected with it.'

'And his poor wife will not, I fear, accompany him,' said Captain Shaw.

‘Mrs. Anstruther knows more about his wife than I do,’ said Mrs. Bradshaw. ‘She has frequent communication with Arling.’

‘I have had one letter from Bessie Penryhn since I came home, that is all ;’ I replied.

‘I ventured to suggest a course of conciliation, when Mr. Randolph was here last,’ observed Captain Shaw ; ‘for I have known him from his boyhood, and our relations partake of the paternal and filial character.’

‘Then, I do entreat you, my friend, do what no one else can, and bring him to reason,’ exclaimed Mrs. Bradshaw. ‘Every one is in such deadly fear of Mr. Randolph, that he lives in a state of utter moral blindness ; and the end will be that, simply from cowardice, his wife will be driven to despair, and Marietta utterly sacrificed.’

‘There are two sides to that assertion, as regards Mrs. Randolph,’ I said ; ‘but as to Marietta, what can Captain Shaw or anyone else do to help her ?’

‘If this good lady would be so very kind as to enlighten me,’ said Captain Shaw, ‘I should be greatly indebted to her. My mind does not receive and entertain ideas as it used to do. Seventy-three my last birthday.’

‘Hush ! hush ! my dear sir,’ exclaimed Mrs. Bradshaw. ‘We can’t hear confessions. You are a gay, gallant gentleman of fifty,—not a day older ; and as for enlightening you, I look to you as the one person who will help us to see our way out of a maze of difficulties. I am going to talk to you now, as if Mrs. Anstruther was not present. She is turned into nobody—a cabbage stump ; such I used to be told to consider my audience when I was a young girl, and ordered to sing in company. So, now, we will talk freely.’

The old man bent forward, leaning both his hands upon his gold-headed cane, in an attitude of the deepest attention.

‘I need not lengthen matters,’ continued Mrs. Bradshaw; ‘we both know that the Dernham people have been gossiping a great deal lately about a very charming, sensible, high-minded,—I stop,—because cabbage stumps may, for aught we know, have both ears and souls; but anyhow, very ill-natured things have been said, and the person who has set them afloat is Mr. Randolph. Now you, my dear Captain, are, as you confess, an old tried friend of his, and also, what is even more to the purpose,—a very devoted,—what shall I say?—admirer, appreciator of this fair lady.’

‘A faithful knight, I hope I may call myself,’ said the old man, bowing deeply to me.

‘Precisely! a faithful knight! ready to try your lance with any one who may presume to annoy the said fair lady. Therefore I venture to say, that it will become you to enter the lists with Mr. Randolph, and convince him of his error.’

‘Indeed! no,’ I exclaimed; ‘I cannot possibly allow—’

‘Silence! my good cabbage stump,’ said Mrs. Bradshaw; ‘you forget what you are. It is, my dear Captain, most important that Mr. Randolph’s mind should be disabused, and there is no one who can better undertake the task than yourself.’

The Captain looked alarmed. ‘I would certainly do it with the greatest satisfaction. I might be thought to interfere unjustifiably; but when a lady is concerned, pray do not doubt me. I would do it—but—if I only knew what to say——’ And he gazed at us with such a helpless, bewildered expression, that we both burst out laughing.

‘You must say what you think,’ said Mrs. Bradshaw. ‘State the facts which you know to be true.’

‘But I know none,’ said the old man, despairingly.

‘And on what grounds, then, my dear Captain, have you ventured to disbelieve the Dernham gossip?’

'I cannot say, madam. But having made the acquaintance of this excellent lady, I felt there was no need for facts.'

Mrs. Bradshaw grasped his hand. 'My good friend—you are the most trustworthy champion that ever a slandered woman was blest with, and I honour you from the depths of my heart;—but if this amiable cabbage stump will convert herself into Mrs. Anstruther again, and do us the favour just to state shortly the silly little trifles which the Dernham gossips have converted into great offences, you see you will be furnished with a whole armoury of facts, and may confront your enemy with a certainty of victory.'

Captain Shaw looked at me, but said nothing; neither did I. Mrs. Bradshaw, I felt, was going too far. I did not choose to be thus compelled to vindicate myself.

'Not inclined to speak?' said Mrs. Bradshaw, impatiently. 'Well, then, I must speak for you.'

'Excuse me,' said Captain Shaw; 'but I should prefer hearing from this lady herself all that is to be told.'

'I am really very greatly obliged to you, Captain Shaw,' I said; 'and I believe I ought to be obliged to my friend, Mrs. Bradshaw, also; but, to confess the truth, I don't quite understand why I am to be urged to make explanations against my will. I would rather that falsehoods should wear themselves out.'

'I could not have believed you would have been so absurdly proud,' exclaimed Mrs. Bradshaw. 'Here you are in the presence of one of your truest friends, and you won't say the half-dozen words which are needed to put everything straight in his sight, and enable him to make everything straight with Mr. Randolph.'

'I have no objection to tell Captain Shaw anything and everything,' I said; 'but I protest against any use of my words being made with regard to Mr. Randolph.'

'Leave Captain Shaw and myself to manage Mr. Ran-

dolph,' exclaimed Mrs. Bradshaw. 'You may be quite sure we won't compromise you in any way; and, what is more, I will undertake that he shall go down on his knees, and beg your pardon. Only be a sensible woman, and speak.'

It was an immense effort to me. I felt, all the time, as if I was making an excuse and explanation to Mr. Randolph himself; and what I said was, I know, very short: it was, in fact, a simple recapitulation of the few facts which had been so twisted and perverted. Captain Shaw apologised humbly for taking out his note-book, and making memoranda, and I controlled myself sufficiently to offer no objection; but Mrs. Bradshaw assured me afterwards, that I looked as if I could have taken the book from his hand, and thrown it into the fire. As for herself, she was in a state of complete triumph, and really provoked me by her congratulations, when Captain Shaw left us together; for I felt lowered by having been called upon to put such very private matters into the hands of a comparative stranger. Excellent old man though Captain Shaw is, I know no one I should fancy more likely to blunder.

Mrs. Bradshaw's quick eye must have noticed my secret annoyance, for she stopped in the middle of one of her excited speeches, and said: 'But, after all, I believe I have done no good; you would rather have been left to flounder in the Slough of Despond by yourself.'

'It is not a Slough of Despond,' I replied; 'and, if it had been, I don't at all see as yet that I am likely to get out of it.'

'That is because you don't understand Mr. Randolph's character. He has his vulnerable points.'

'They must be many,' I said, 'if a poor dear old man like Captain Shaw, is to discover them.'

'Poor dear old man! Take care. If you live long

for making things clear. Why do I insist upon your having any champion ?’

‘I must own the truth; if I don’t, some day it will own itself. I have an object. Yesterday’s evening post brought me a letter from Mrs. Randolph, decisive as to the fact that she will not, at present,—this is her expression,—return to her husband; his conditions, she says, are too hard. She could not keep them, and, therefore, will not accept them. This, by-the-by, is a specimen of what I have always maintained as to her truthfulness of nature. Even, if she were to agree to them, she would only at present have Victor with her for a month in the summer; his home is to be with his great uncle. She calls this tyranny, and she declines the offer.

‘Whether the determination is the result of Arling influence, or not, you will judge better than I can. That the letter to Mr. Randolph has been written, and sent, is an undoubted fact; and now, what is to be done with Marietta? Can you take her,—and will you? I know the rector put the question, in his blundering way, the other day. He and I had been talking about it, and I said to him, casually, not precisely intending he should act, “do try and find a home for her.” He was only too happy to accept the commission, but he came back to me, disheartened, saying,—only in more civil and orthodox words,—“that you were as proud as Lucifer, and he could make nothing of you;” whereupon, I determined to see what I could make of you myself, and that was the chief motive of my yesterday’s visit; though, having thought of the old Captain, before, as a mediator, when I met him I could not help seizing upon him.

‘But now comes the important question,—will you, or will you not, take charge of Marietta? If you say, decidedly, no; then I shall be strongly inclined to agree with you, and let these ill-natured stories die a natural

death, though it may be a lingering one. But if, supposing Mr. Randolph could be brought to penitence, and were humbly to make the request,—you would accept Marietta as one of your family, then, by all means, let us make every effort to bring the man to reason. It is not a question of self-respect, but of charity. The poor child is, just now, homeless. She is a little wilful, a little self-reliant, ignorant of English stiffness and proprieties, likely to do and say things which may be misconstrued; therefore, above all things, needing a kind, wise judge. I can't be that, myself; I am not wise, and, if I were, Marietta does not think me so; she is reserved with me, and would be unhappy. With you, it would be quite the reverse; she would have companionship, advice, sympathy, everything. You see I am quite bent upon it. The pecuniary question would be no difficulty, for Marietta has her own independence, and would be only too happy to give her full share towards your house-keeping; that I know from one or two things she has said in talking to my little daughter-in-law, not *à propos* to you particularly, but to her finding a home anywhere. Marion is so bewitched with her, that she would fain take her to live with herself: but I have put my face against that idea. Joint households are dangerous and awkward things, where married people are concerned.

‘There, now, my dear friend, I have told you the whole, without reservation. Now, think it all over, and decide; only, let the decision be speedy.’

‘Yours affectionately,

‘C. B.’

Was it very unkind in me to hesitate, after reading this note? Ought I not to have instantly consented, and received Marietta with open arms? But I did hesitate, and, what is more, I have not, after due consideration, consented; that is to say, I have not said no; but,

neither, have I said yes. As I explained to the rector, any apology coming from Mr. Randolph must be quite independent of the idea of Marietta's living with me. I will not have it supposed, that either I, or my friends, have any ulterior object in wishing to put forward the truth. A suspicious man must be dealt with suspiciously. I have said as much to Mrs. Bradshaw, giving her *carte blanche* as to her explanations, or Captain Shaw's; but leaving myself quite free as to what my answer to the request shall be, supposing it should be made.

I do not, however, feel that I shall really have any option in the matter. Situated as Marietta is, I do not think I could refuse the charge, and, under the circumstances I should not wish to do so. But, I have lately had a most impatient desire to get rid of all Randolph associations, whether good or bad. It has seemed to me, sometimes, as if I had Sindbad's Old Man of the Mountain upon my shoulders, and must rid myself of him, at all hazards. If Marietta should come to live with me, this cannot be done. Perhaps, I ought not to wish it. People often talk irreverently, and foolishly, about fatality, as if there were certain things from which there could not possibly be an escape; but there is a truth in their facts, though not in their conclusions. Few persons, probably, have lived long in the world without discovering that there are peculiar trials and peculiar connections and associations haunting them, as it were; turning up, unexpectedly, pressing upon them when they thought they had shaken them off. At first, the perception of this kind of mis-called fatality is irritating, and makes one rouse oneself to avoid it; but, after a time, I think one comes to resign oneself to it; I hope not, in a wrong spirit. There is, doubtless, some particular purpose in it, and it would never do to run away from positive duty, because one had this half-superstitious dread of its consequences.

Therefore Marietta shall be as my eldest child, if it should be plainly pointed out that such is the will of God : but I will not move a step in the matter myself, because, in taking her into my home, I must continue the Randolph associations, which I so earnestly long to be delivered from ; and not all my love and interest for Marietta can reconcile me to this idea.

CHAPTER XL.

January 22.—Captain Shaw really is a most kind friend: he has offered to let his man-servant take charge of Charley, who goes back to school to-morrow. I have kept him at home a little beyond the usual time, in order that he might get quite strong. Drake, Captain Shaw's man, was going up to London on business, so it is a satisfactory arrangement, in all ways. I was going with Charley myself. I felt afraid for him to travel alone, after his illness; but I am not sorry to turn him over to a man who will be careful of him, without petting him.

This unfortunate illness seems to have thrown him back in manliness; it has made him fussy and fanciful, and exacting. He lets his sisters wait upon him too much; Cecil and Agnes would be quite his slaves, if I would allow it; and there is always the excuse that he must be careful, not tire himself, not take cold, &c. I do hope school will do something towards remedying this. I have such an intense dread of refined selfishness in men, and this would be just Charley's temptation; but I have put it before him in a few plain words. I talked to him a little yesterday afternoon, when he was telling me how sorry he was to leave me; and though he winced a little at first, when I said that, if he remained longer at home, he would become effeminate and self-indulgent, yet I think I touched him, though it might be only by rousing his pride. I saw that, in the evening, he would not let either of the girls fetch things for him as he had been accustomed to do lately; and he proposed himself, that,

as he should have no fire in his room at school, he should give it up beforehand, so as to become accustomed to the loss. Personal self-gratification in small ways is such a special snare for a man. A woman, by the circumstances of her position, is more disciplined in such matters. But one can always work upon Charley by affection, and I am sure he kissed me all the more heartily, because I showed him that, notwithstanding my love for him, I am not blind to his failings.

Mr. Randolph did not come the day he was expected, so that matter remains in '*statu quo*.' But Lady Anson called yesterday, to my great surprise, and with her came Mr. Neville,—*the* Mr. Neville, who is to travel with Henry Anson. I suspect I am indebted to him for the honour of the visit; though, to do Lady Anson justice, she would never do her duty in the censor line, if she were not kept up to it by the strong-minded Mrs. Howard. At all events, she was civil to me, though not cordial, and unquestionably timid; fearing, I suspect, at every moment lest Mrs. Howard should appear, and rebuke her.

Mr. Neville I like, yet I can scarcely say we got on very well together; he is tall and gentlemanly in manners and appearance, but by no means handsome, though he has a clever forehead, and quick, dark eyes; his mouth is large, and he has very high cheekbones, which give him rather a scraggy look. He was very courteous, but somewhat stiff and cautious. Mrs. Bradshaw may have made progress through the medium of mutual acquaintanceship; but I felt as if I had failed, though we really spoke of a good many people. His young cousin Frank seems his great interest, and he really was warm in his expressions about him; but I learnt nothing about anyone else. I mentioned John Penryhn's name, but all the information I could get was, that he was a clever fellow, and just going to Oxford. I was not prepared for that; I fancied

he was younger. The family relationships are puzzling. Mr. Neville, the rich uncle, so far as I can learn, is the head of the family; he is not married, but may marry. Mr. Neville gave me distinctly to understand, that, although he was the oldest of the nephews, he did not look upon himself as the heir presumptive, for the property is not entailed. He himself is going to the bar eventually, but he wishes to travel first. I suspect the uncle takes all the expenses. He gave me the idea of having something upon his mind not quite comfortable. I noticed it after I had mentioned John Penryhn. I asked Lady Anson if she was going to part with her son for three years. She quite started at the idea, and said, 'Oh, no, certainly not for more than two; reports were so exaggerated. And then Mr. Neville added, that he must return, and begin work before three years were over. I asked if the Henry Penryhns were likely to return to England, and was told 'no.' They had become habituated to colonial life; at least, Mr. Penryhn had, and would never bear the restraints of an old country. Mr. Neville had never seen his aunt, and knew very little about her, except that she had been a great beauty; John Penryhn, he said, was considered extremely like her, and he was unquestionably singularly handsome. I could not help fancying there was a little tone of something like regret,—it would be unfair to call it envy, in this remark; as if Mr. Neville was alive to his own lack of personal advantages, and had suffered from it. One fancies men are superior to this kind of feeling, but I suppose they are not. Mr. Neville, however, really has nothing to complain of: I have seen many men much more regularly good-looking, who were not really half as pleasant to look at. What he wants is ease of manner, and indeed ease of tone altogether. I think we should have done better if we had been left alone, and I had been able to make my own

explorations into his unknown mind; but having to carry Lady Anson with me was a complete drawback: we could keep upon nothing but the surface of things, and he would express no opinions about anyone. I walked with them to the garden gate, and we met Marietta and Ina coming in. Ina has rather a schoolgirlish way of avoiding visitors, which always annoys me, because I know she watches, and laughs at them behind their backs; and I forced her to stop and speak to Lady Anson, and introduced both her and Marietta to Mr. Neville. I observed Marietta's manner to Lady Anson, and could not help being struck by it; it was so quietly dignified and self-possessed, that it quite gave her the upper-hand. I think Lady Anson would willingly have avoided taking any notice of her, but Marietta did not or would not see the timid efforts to move away with merely a slight bow; and when we stood talking together for a few seconds, she bore her little part in the conversation, in a way which compelled Lady Anson to recognise and be civil to her. I feel nearly sure Mr. Neville has been taken into Lady Anson's confidence with regard to Marietta, and the fears for Henry Anson. He watched Marietta so attentively, and yet not admiringly, only as if he was making observations for future use.

Poor Lady Anson! What will she say if it should be settled that Marietta is to remain with me? She will look upon me as her natural enemy. But there are many things to be done and said before that can come to pass. I need not trouble myself about it yet; and anyhow, I am glad that Lady Anson has called.

January 23.—Mr. Randolph is here. Nurse told me that this morning, and so I may expect soon to hear of success or failure in the explanation. Either way, I think I shall be satisfied. Lady Anson's visit clearly shows that the tide has turned in this part of the world;

and if I can once live down foolish reports at Dernham, I shall not trouble myself about what is said of me elsewhere. Charley went off this morning, under Drake's care. He was very brave about it, yet not so really brave as my little Agnes, whose whole heart is wrapt up in him, but who would not give way for fear of distressing me; and has been hard at work all day, with a bright smile on her face, even when her eyes have been brimful with tears. Charley feels the hardships of school a good deal, but he likes regular occupation and being with boy companions; and the thought of having Frank Neville with him is quite an excitement. All these things tended to keep him up. His last words to me were: 'Mamma, I won't crib, and I do mean to work hard; indeed I do.' The promise not to crib made me more thankful than I can say; it showed that he had not forgotten his illness. As to the hard work, I thoroughly believe in his good intentions. The only thing I doubt is whether he quite understands what hard work means.

Strange, and interesting, and often sad it is to mark how we all deceive ourselves more or less in like manner; working up to our standard, and feeling that we have a right, in consequence, to a clear conscience, but not perceiving that the standard itself is low. I hope Mr. Pierce will not let Charley be blinded in this way. I go about the house, thinking of him, I am afraid, too anxiously; and sometimes, in my folly, almost fancying that I could do better with him, if I had him more entirely under my own eye. He is so clever at excuses! In this respect so different from Hugh, who, when I say to him, if he is inattentive at his lessons, 'Hugh, you are naughty and idle,' looks up in my face and answers, 'Yes, but I will be good,' and turns resolutely away from the temptation, whatever it may be, and fixes his great round eyes upon his book with the solemnity of a judge.

CHAPTER XLI.

January 26.—I could not write yesterday,—I felt stunned,—I feel so now,—but I must put it all down in detail. The day before yesterday, the 24th—I was sitting at work, feeling glad I had the excuse of a stormy, though not a rainy afternoon, to enable me to make up arrears in that line, when Mrs. Bradshaw was announced. She came in tired and cold, and, as I saw at once, mentally, as well as physically, out of sorts; for, unlike herself, she spoke almost crossly. At the first moment it did not strike me what could be amiss, and I asked her quietly, whether she was wise in being out in such weather. Instead of answering me directly, she sat down by the fire, and begged I would give her a glass of wine and a piece of cake, for she had had no luncheon. Both were ordered directly, and then I repeated my question in a new form, ‘had she been far?’

‘No,—not far; but farther than she desired ever to go again.’

The truth flashed upon me. ‘You have not been to Woodleigh?’ I said.

‘Yes, I have.’

‘And seen Mr. Randolph?’

‘Yes.’

‘Well! and what——’

She interrupted me. ‘Don’t ask me to tell you what he says. If ever there was a cold, hard, narrow-minded——’

‘Hush! hush! He refuses, I see, to hear explanations; but I thought Captain Shaw was to undertake the task.’

‘So he did undertake it; but undertaking is not completing. Men! what fools they are! and what cowards!’

‘Don’t say that in the old Captain’s hearing,’ I said, laughing.

‘But they are cowards, moral cowards, one and all. If I had been in Captain Shaw’s place——’

‘Well! but you have been; you have seen Mr. Randolph.’

‘Don’t provoke me. I never felt before what the temptation to swear was.’

I handed her some wine, told her to eat her cake, carried away her shawl, brought her a footstool, stirred the fire and made a bright blaze, and then said, ‘You have done your best, and the affair is in higher Hands than ours, so leave it.’

‘Yes,’ she said gravely, ‘I do leave it; but leaving it won’t make wrong right. It is a sin,—nothing less than a sin, that any one should slander his neighbour, as Mr. Randolph slanders you. He had the face to tell me, that, but for your interference, his wife would have returned to him. He told Captain Shaw the same, and the old man, instead of giving him the lie direct, wished him good morning, and came off to me to make inquiries.’

‘I don’t see what else he could have done,’ I said; ‘he could not contradict a charge which he knew nothing about.’

‘Could not! but I tell you he could, he should, he ought. It is the only way to deal with Mr. Randolph! Knock him down with assertions, and then, when he comes to his senses, show him what an idiot he is. But you can do nothing with him till you have knocked him down.’

‘Yet you must have tried the plan yourself,’ I said, ‘and nevertheless failed.’

‘Yes, I failed. Mr. Randolph had foiled Captain Shaw, and so he was strengthened in his absurd convictions, and would not listen to a word I said, simply

because I am a woman. But it is my own fault. I should not have trusted to a simpleton. I used to think that a woman, with a fair quantity of brains, could never turn them to greater advantage than by making use of men with few brains. But I was mistaken, or, at any rate, I have failed, which comes to the same thing.'

'And what is the upshot of it all?' I asked.

'That is soon told. He insists upon removing Marietta from the neighbourhood. That was all I could learn, for, in fact, he fairly bowed me out of the house.'

'I am not surprised at it,' I said.

'Don't repeat that,' exclaimed Mrs. Bradshaw; 'don't make excuses; don't argue with me. I can't bear it.'

'My dear friend,' I said, 'don't for a moment think I am ungrateful. I feel, more than I can express, all that you have wished and tried to do for me; but to say that I was sanguine as to the result, is impossible. We must now be content to sit down patiently, and wait for time to work. It is working already. I see it in Lady Anson's manner, and when Mr. Randolph is gone, which will be very soon, the nine days' wonder will be forgotten.'

'I thought how it was,' exclaimed Mrs. Bradshaw; 'you care nothing for Marietta. Her life will be simply miserable.'

'I do care for her,' I said; 'but I should be very sorry to think that her happiness depended upon living with me, which, after all, I had never absolutely contemplated.'

'I hate such shilly-shallying,' was the reply. 'If I had been in your place, I should have opened my arms to Marietta at the first moment. I should not have had a moment's doubt.'

'You and I are differently constituted,' I said.

'Yes, we are; and you may be thankful for it. Oh! the pain I should spare myself in life, if I could only give up day-dreams for others, as I have, long ago, for

myself. I thought you would be so happy together. I planned everything for you. I even went through the scene with Marietta, when she would be told she was to stay ; in fact, I was a child—a baby ; but it is all over now.'

There were tears in Mrs. Bradshaw's eyes, and my own heart reproached me for coldness, even for something worse. Provoked as I was with Mrs. Randolph, and pained for Marietta, I still could not avoid a certain sense of relief in the knowledge that I was to have no new charge, and that the Randolph connection was broken for ever.

'I don't think we shall do each other any good by discussing the matter farther,' I said. 'It is taken out of our hands, and the best we can do is to forget it.'

'If possible,' said Mrs. Bradshaw, emphatically. 'You have nothing more to do with Mr. Randolph. You will not have to hear all his senseless plans for Marietta ; you won't see her wretchedness and dreariness. There will not be a more lonely being on the face of the earth than that poor child when she leaves Dernham. But, as you say, it is best not to talk of it. Thank you for the wine and cake. I am the better for them. Now, good-bye.'

And so Mrs. Bradshaw went away. And then, with what I hope was only natural perverseness, I took the opposite view of the question. I felt not only angry with Mr. Randolph, but disappointed, and what I can only call *blanked*, when I thought of Marietta. It was as if a great interest had been taken out of my life. All the pleasant possibilities connected with her presented themselves, and especially I felt what the loss would be for Ina. I wandered out into the garden, hoping to soothe my unsatisfactory state of mind ; and walked up and down the sheltered path, by the locked gate, going over in my mind the little incidents which had first led to the unfortunate intercourse with Woodleigh ; and

thinking whether I could in any way have acted differently, so as to have avoided the annoyance which had followed. But thinking did me no good. I was put out of my usual groove, and what I wanted was to be put back into it by something practical. I had been intending to go to the rectory to ask about some new books for the Sunday-school; but the wind had given me an excuse for delay. Now, however, I determined to go. I was too fretted to sit still patiently, and the very fact of battling with the storm would, I fancied, divert my thoughts and give me a sense of energy, which might prevent my dwelling upon all these worries.

Such a gale I encountered when I left the garden! The elm trees in the lane were swaying and bending, and scattering broken twigs all over the pathway; and after each momentary lull, the fierce wind came howling and shrieking, in terrible harmony with the deep under-swell of the sea, whose white, curling foam I could see in the distance, as the waves sprang up in frantic rage against the rocks. My first impulse was to go back, but the scene on the shore would, I knew, be magnificent, if I could only get so far; and I thought I should find Ina and Cecil there, as they had gone into the village, before the wind had attained its full fury, and were likely to return that way; so I went on. Just as I was moving down the beach lane, I met them coming back. The waves, they said, were so splendid, that they quite longed for me to see them, and had returned to fetch me.

‘We shall have rain, though, in a few minutes,’ observed Cecil, looking upwards. ‘I fancied the wind would be too high for it.’

Some large pattering drops fell on our heads, as she spoke, and I looked round for shelter. ‘We shall be wise in going home at once,’ I said. ‘If the rain should come down, it will wet us through before we are prepared.’

‘It is hail, not rain,’ observed Ina. Almost at the same moment, a really tremendous storm broke over us; the wind swept past us with the force of a hurricane, and the idea of sheltering ourselves with umbrellas was out of the question.

The two girls ran towards home, but Cecil was so quickly out of breath, that I feared the consequences, and called to her to stop.

Ina, who was in front, looked round, and pointing with her finger, said, doubtfully, ‘There is the Woodleigh Lodge.’

I nodded my assent, and Ina ran in, Cecil following her. I was too thankful for the shelter to think of what or where it was, and when I entered the little room, I found Cecil, leaning back in a chair, rather faint and exhausted, and Mrs. Green offering her water. Of course, I thought of nothing else at the moment, except to make Ina dry the skirts of her dress, which even, in those few minutes, had been nearly soaked through.

The storm continued with awful violence. The little cottage quite rocked, and Mrs. Green gazed up anxiously at the ceiling, and muttered that she hoped the chimneys were safe. ‘And Mr. Randolph out in it, too,’ she said, going to the door. ‘But I hope he may be in Westford; he went that way.’

‘Men don’t care for storms as women do,’ I said.

‘Well, no, ma’am, not generally; but Mr. Randolph asked my husband what he thought of the weather, and John told him there was like to be storms; so it seemed all the more venturesome.’ She went a step beyond the porch;—‘But, eh! who would have thought it? Here he is. Come in, sir, do come in. You will be wet through, going up to the house.’

A shadow darkened the doorway. Mr. Randolph was in the porch. I looked round for some way of escape, but there was only the entrance to the back scullery,

besides the steep little staircase leading to the bedrooms. I had no alternative but to remain.

‘Come in, sir, do ye,’ persisted Mrs. Green, nearly pulling Mr. Randolph into the house. ‘You are not the first visitor; and you’ll be drenched through and through there; the wind so drives the rain into the porch.’

Certainly it did. Even opening the door had given admittance to a slanting deluge; and Mrs. Green spoke peremptorily.

Mr. Randolph came in, glanced round, and bowed very stiffly; so did I. Mrs. Green drew a chair near the fire, and begged him to sit down, and then went to Cecil, asking her how she felt, and if she would not have something else—a little brandy, perhaps. ‘Brandy is good for faints, and that’s true, is n’t it, sir?’ she said, appealing to Mr. Randolph.

Cecil shook her head, in answer to this suggestion; but she looked very pale.

‘If we could lay her down, ma’am,’ said Mrs. Green. ‘I could put her on my bed upstairs, if we could once get her there.’

‘It might be a good thing,’ I said; ‘but I don’t see how it is to be managed—the stairs are so narrow.’

‘I would try,’ murmured Cecil, making an effort to rise. I saw she was oppressed by Mr. Randolph’s presence. He sat, cowering over the fire, with a stern gloom on his face.

‘It might be better to send for a carriage,’ I said, ‘and take you home at once, dear child.’

‘My little lad is not within call,’ said Mrs. Green, ‘and if he was—’ and she looked towards the window,—‘I don’t think as how he could venture.’

Mr. Randolph spoke: ‘I will go myself, for a carriage, madam, if necessary.’

‘Oh! no, thank you, on no account,’ I exclaimed, hurriedly. ‘Cecil, darling, if we can get you upstairs, you

will be better.' I put my arm round her, and Mrs. Green helped me, and, with less difficulty than I expected, we almost carried her up to Mrs. Green's little bedroom—far from a quiet resting-place, for the hail beat against the casement as if it would knock an entrance; and Mrs. Green's hints about the chimneys recurred to my mind most uncomfortably. A wilder storm I had never heard.

Cecil seemed frightened and tired, as well as faint, and I did not like to leave her; but she closed her eyes, and I hoped—though it seemed scarcely probable—that she might go off to sleep. I sat by the bed, watching her, and Mrs. Green went downstairs. In the occasional lullings of the storm, I thought I heard Mr. Randolph talking to her, but I did not pay much attention to the fact, though it crossed my mind that Ina would be more comfortable in having her there than in being left alone with Mr. Randolph. Presently, however, Mrs. Green stole up the stairs again, and still I heard Mr. Randolph's voice below, and then I asked whom he was talking to.

Mrs. Green looked surprised. 'Oh! the young lady, ma'am, to be sure. I was in the back kitchen, but I heard a word or two. He is apt to speak out, but he doesn't always mean it.'

'I don't understand!—what are you talking of?' I exclaimed; but as Mrs. Green was going to answer, I remembered Cecil, and put up my finger for silence.

'Don't leave me, mamma,' murmured Cecil, rousing herself.

'Mrs. Green will stay with you, dear,' I said. 'I must go downstairs for a moment.' Mrs. Green took my place, and I went down.

Mr. Randolph saw me, as I entered the little room. Ina did not. She was sitting down by the fire, holding her hat in her hand, and twisting it nervously. Mr. Randolph was standing. He just glanced at me, but took no other

notice, and I caught the words, 'You will bring sorrow on yourself, and disgrace on your family.'

Then I stepped forward. Ina stood up, offered me her chair, and managed to say with somewhat of dignity in her tone, 'Mamma, you will talk to Mr. Randolph.'

'Your sister will be glad to have you with her upstairs, my dear,' I said.

'I beg your pardon, madam,' interrupted Mr. Randolph; 'but I must request—I must—' he was stopped by his usual difficulty of articulation, and the pause was almost ludicrous;—'I must be permitted to conclude what I had to say to this young lady.'

He was standing so near the little staircase, that Ina could not pass him unless he moved. In despair she sat down again; so did I. The wind, which had been dying down, rose again, and a screech rang through the branches of the great trees which stood near the Lodge. Mr. Randolph was insensible to it, except that he raised his voice, and pitched it high, so as to give more effect to his words; and then he began a kind of speech which I can only liken to the vehement exhortations of a field-preacher. It was a homily upon Ina's sins and mine, the text being what he called well-known and undeniable facts, which were alluded to, but not openly stated, so that they could be refuted. I listened, at first indignantly, impatiently, then with surprise, and, at last, actually with interest. The man impressed me. He was a maniac—so far as being possessed by one idea, and that a false one—but he was in earnest, so heartily in earnest, that I found myself following him as if he was speaking truth about some one else. He spoke of evil associations, early training, the fatal consequences of one false step, the wreck of honour and happiness which might, which would follow; and he was eloquent—more than eloquent—he was positively convincing, there was no pretence in it: what he said, he thought and felt, there could not be a moment's doubt of

it. He believed that Ina was going to destruction—that I was leading her there. He warned us from the fulness of his heart. I could even have believed that his words were prompted more by interest than anger. But there was no stopping him; once or twice he paused for breath, and found difficulty in beginning again, and then I tried to put in a few words of explanation; but he took no more notice of them than the wind did. The storm of words swept on madly, but with somewhat of ‘method in their madness,’ till, in the very effort of listening to them, even without seeing their reasonable connection, I felt physically exhausted.

Ina had drawn her chair closer and closer to mine as the speech went on: she put her hand within mine; it was very cold, and I felt it tremble. At one or two of his most violent expressions our eyes met, and her glance implored me to let her go, but it was impossible; and Mr. Randolph, when he caught the movement, addressed himself more especially to her, making her position still more distressing.

There had been two or three personal exhortations; another was beginning. Ina shook all over, and I felt that the situation was becoming unbearable. I rose, and went to the Lodge door, and was about to open it, hoping we might escape, when Mrs. Green called out from the top of the stairs: ‘Stop, ma’am, stop; we shall have the house down with the gust; and won’t ye have a cup of tea? Mr. Randolph and all?’ She clattered down the stairs, repeating her proposal. ‘A nice, sociable cup of tea: if I may be so bold as to offer it, warming you through.’

‘Woman,’ thundered Mr. Randolph, ‘leave us.’

‘Beg pardon, sir; but Miss—why, she’s as white as her sister. I’ll put the kettle on directly. Beg pardon, sir.’ She made her way past Mr. Randolph, forcing him to move; and Ina at the same instant rushed up the stairs.

Mrs. Green looked after her in amazement.

‘Poor young thing! she’s frightened, but the tea will set it right,’ she muttered.

Mr. Randolph stood by the window.

‘Them trees rock, sir, don’t they?’ said Mrs. Green.

‘They are very old,’ she added, speaking to me; ‘but not so old as the oak by the upper gate. My husband said he had a great thought that would have been down in the last gale. You are not going, sir, sure,’ again turning to Mr. Randolph.

He went to the door.

‘The hail is over,’ I said. ‘I think I will leave the young ladies here for a few minutes, and go into the village myself to order a carriage for them. I doubt if they ought to walk home.’

‘Without the tea? It will be ready in five minutes,’ exclaimed Mrs. Green. ‘Do ye wait, sir.’

Mr. Randolph was looking for his hat. It was behind my chair. He made me a most courteous bow as I gave it him. ‘Madam,’ he said, ‘we may never, perhaps, meet again, but I trust you will remember my words.’

‘Certainly, Mr. Randolph,’ was my reply. ‘They have been too extraordinary to be forgotten.’

He took no notice of Mrs. Green, but strode out of the house. Mrs. Green looked after him, and I heard her say to herself—‘daft.’ Wilder than ever raged the wind, though the hail had ceased. Mrs. Green tried in vain to stop me, as I prepared to follow Mr. Randolph’s example, and face it.

‘It’s bad enough for a man,’ she said, ‘but a woman could not possibly stand it. Just try now.’

We both went out, and stood in the porch. Mr. Randolph was walking up the avenue towards the house.

‘He goes fast, doesn’t he?’ said Mrs. Green. ‘I never saw a man walk faster, when he’s a mind. It will be a

race between him and the postman,' she added; 'for he's just on beyond.'

I remarked then that a man, who, I suppose, had struck into the avenue from some cross path, was just in front of Mr. Randolph. The latter was apparently trying to overtake him. Mrs. Green was curious to see whether he succeeded, and lingered in the porch. I went again into the house. A few seconds afterwards, Mrs. Green came back laughing.

'Who would have thought,' she said, 'that any one could stop and ask about letters in such a storm as this? But it just like master; when he's got anything in his head, there's nothing in all the world will keep him from it; and there he is, standing in the middle of the road reading his letter, even as if he was in his own parlour. But do sit down, ma'am, the water is just boiling, and I do think there's going to be a lull.'

I thought so too, and went to the foot of the stairs, intending to go up, and see how Cecil was; but I had scarcely ascended three steps, when a blast, fiercer than any we had yet heard, yelled through the avenue, and, almost instantly afterwards, the crash of a falling tree shook the little cottage to its centre. A scream of horror caught my ear. The voice was Ina's. She sprang down the stairs, and, rushing past me, exclaimed—'Mamma! mamma! he's killed!' and ran out of the house. Mrs. Green and myself went after her; we needed no explanation. Just where Mr. Randolph had stood, an uprooted oak was stretched across the road; the smaller trees and shrubs, crushed by its fall, were lying, buried, beneath it. Amongst them, a dark, motionless mass was indistinctly seen on the ground.

I believe I thought first of Ina,—that she, too, would, in some way, be crushed. I called to her, but my voice was lost. It was impossible for me to follow, at her pace,

and I turned to Mrs. Green, and said, as calmly as I could, 'Go for your husband;' and then I hurried on to the spot where Mr. Randolph was lying.

I cannot describe what I saw. I pray, night and day, that I may forget it. He had been knocked down by one of the great branches, and half his body was crushed beneath it. His head and one arm were free. He was not dead, but we could not move him, nor help him. I was not certain whether he was conscious. Ina turned away, for one instant, in horror, and then threw herself down beside him, in the vain hope that she might drag him from under the heavy weight. 'Stay with him,' I said; 'I will go on to the house.'

'Oh, no, mamma! let me go!' exclaimed Ina.

But I was seized with a great fear; it seemed as though every tree in the avenue might fall;—and Ina was safe where she was. I could not let her run the risk. 'Not you,' I said; 'I will go.' Ina gave one shuddering glance at Mr. Randolph's face, then she said, quietly, 'Yes, I will stay;' and I left her, kneeling on the ground, and wiping the livid features with her handkerchief.

It was but a short distance to the house, but I could with difficulty stand against the wind, and, in two places, fallen trees, though of a much smaller size than that which had crushed Mr. Randolph, impeded my progress. I saw no one in the garden, and the woman in charge of the place was not to be found. A girl, who had been hired to wait upon Mr. Randolph, for the time being, came to the door, and said that she did not know where to meet with anyone. I sent her, instantly, to the village, and went myself round the premises; and, oh, how earnestly I longed that the door into our own garden had been open! But it was locked, and, though I shook it, and called, the roaring wind prevented me from making myself heard.

I hurried back again to the avenue, and, to my intense relief, saw a party of men hastening towards the spot where I had left Ina. She herself was standing by Mr. Randolph, but looking up the avenue. She did not come forward to me, but seemed rooted to the place where she stood.

‘Ina, darling, we have done all we could,’ I said, as I drew near; ‘we must go home.’

She looked at me with a kind of half comprehension, but still neither moved nor spoke.

I put my arm round her, to draw her away; she resisted for a moment, but when I spoke imperatively, she silently obeyed me. I dared not turn to look at what went on after we left the spot, and tried to prevent Ina from doing so; but I saw her glance round, and felt her shudder. I said to one of the men, ‘I shall be back, directly,’ and, hurrying on, I took Ina to the Lodge, gave her in charge to Mrs. Green, and returned immediately. But I saw, at once, that, for the moment, I could be of no use, even in giving directions. A boy had already been sent off to Westford, for Mr. Heathfield, the surgeon, and for a nurse; and I had myself told the girl, at the house, what had happened. My first duty was with Ina, whose nerves, I was sure, had received a most alarming shock. I could not, now, wait for a carriage. It was important, above all things, to get her home; so I despatched Mrs. Green to the cottage, for the key of the closed gate, and when she returned with it, I proposed to Ina to go. I was obliged to leave Cecil where she was, for I could not take care of them both, and she still looked pale and faint. Ina’s horror, as we once more approached the scene of the accident, was evident, but she walked past quickly and silently. The wind was a little less tempestuous, and the walk was short: we reached home speedily. I took her to my

room, and told her to lie down on the sofa, but she was in a most singular state of nervous excitement, and could neither lie down nor sit still, for more than a few minutes at a time. What I longed for was, a natural burst of tears; but tears would not come, and, at last, I took Drayton's advice, and left her alone. Drayton undertook to bring Cecil home; and after writing a note to Mrs. Bradshaw, and begging her to break the news to Marietta, and meet me at Woodleigh, I went myself to inquire into Mr. Randolph's condition.

The surgeon had just arrived. I waited for the report in the library,—the room which Mr. Randolph had lately inhabited. Papers and books were lying about, and an uncut number of the *Edinburgh Review*, with an ivory knife left in it, showed what he had been last reading. The fire blazed brightly; a favourite spaniel lay on the hearth-rug, and sleepily roused himself to look round when I entered, doubtless expecting his master; but overhead I heard slow, cautious steps, and low mutterings; and when these ceased there was an awful stillness—possibly—I felt it might be so—the precursor of the stillness of death.

People talk of strange situations awakening thought. I can never think when I feel; but, as I sat in that quiet room, listening, wondering, expecting,—those most solemn words of the burial service rang in my ear, ‘In the midst of life we are in death: of whom may we seek for succour, but of thee, O Lord, who for our sins art justly displeased,’ and I prayed earnestly that God would have mercy on the sufferer, and save him both in body and soul; and comfortingly there came to my mind the conviction that through all his strangeness, prejudice, and temper, Mr. Randolph was at heart a man desirous of living to God. No one could have spoken as he had spoken to Ina and to me, and have been a hypocrite. It seemed one of

those singular instances of a perverted reason, but of a true heart, which occasionally meet us in life, and set our principles of judgment at defiance; teaching us to trust others as well as ourselves to the mercy of the All-wise God.

But time went on, and neither Marietta nor Mrs. Bradshaw appeared. I recollected, then, that they had talked of calling on the Harcourts. It seemed scarcely probable that they would have ventured there in the storm, but I could not otherwise account for the delay. To leave the house till they came was out of the question. I went into the hall, and, finding no one of whom I could ask a question, I at length stole softly up the stairs, and sat down in the lobby, outside Mr. Randolph's room. About ten minutes afterwards Mr. Heathfield came out. The nurse followed him. They came up to me.

'You must telegraph for his wife,' whispered Mr. Heathfield; 'I doubt if he will live through the night.'

'But if we had further advice,—London advice,' I began.

'You may have the whole College of Surgeons, madam,' was Mr. Heathfield's answer, 'but you won't save him. Yet you can send for Tresham, if it will satisfy you. You will see my directions attended to,' he added, turning to the nurse; 'they may save him pain. I shall return in an hour. Above all things, keep his mind quiet; the only shadow of hope depends upon quietness;' and hastily, and I thought a little angrily, he departed.

'Telegraph for his wife,—and, above all things, keep his mind quiet.' Two absolutely incompatible orders. But they so far determined my own course, that I felt it would be wrong to go into the room myself. I could do nothing for him, and the sight of me would unquestionably startle him.

'You will see about it, ma'am,' said the nurse.

‘Yes,’ I replied; ‘but Miss Randolph must be here immediately.’

‘I don’t know; I can’t say, ma’am.’

The woman went back to the sick room.

It was such a small household, I did not know where to find anyone to send to Westford. I did not like to leave the house till I had seen Mrs. Bradshaw and Marietta, and consulted about Mrs. Randolph; but time was infinitely more precious. Mr. Tresham, at all events, must be sent for instantly; and if there was to be the slightest hope of Mrs. Randolph’s seeing her husband alive, it seemed as if it could only be by giving her immediate notice of his state. I went back to the library, and wrote a little note, that might be given to Mrs. Bradshaw. To my inexpressible relief, before I had finished, I heard a carriage drive round to the back of the house, and as I ran out into the hall to see who was arrived, I encountered the very person I desired to see. But Mrs. Bradshaw was alone. She pointed to the staircase, and said:—

‘The poor child is gone up. She would go alone.’

‘Is she prepared?’ I said.

‘Yes; I think so,—anyhow, I could not interfere. But there is hope, surely.’

I repeated what the surgeon had said.

Mrs. Bradshaw turned pale, and walked into the library: I followed her. She seemed unable to speak. Giving her time to recover herself, I wrote the telegraphic message for Mr. Tresham. Then I said:—

‘We must telegraph to Mrs. Randolph also.’

‘It is no use,’ was the faltering reply. ‘She is gone.’

‘Gone! how? where? what do you mean?’

‘Abroad.—Marietta had a letter from her by this afternoon’s post. Coward, as she always has been, she was frightened at her own audacity in refusing to return

to her husband, and fancied herself more free and independent if out of England ; so she is gone.'

'Where was the letter dated from?'

'It had no date. She tells us plainly, she does not intend to give her full address.'

'Does Mr. Randolph know?'

'She says that she was writing to him by the same post.'

That must, then, have been the letter which he lingered to read. I asked how Marietta took the intelligence of her aunt's departure.

'It upset her terribly. She insisted upon going at once to see her uncle, and we set out in spite of the storm; but after we had driven a little way, we both grew frightened, and determined to stop at Mason's farm. We should have been here sooner but for that. No one could find us.'

'At any rate,' I said, 'we must telegraph to Mrs. Penryhn. She may know more than we do; it won't do to let the matter rest without making some effort.'

'Mrs. Penryhn!' exclaimed Mrs. Bradshaw, bitterly; 'you don't think that she knows! She will have been only too glad to rid herself of this poor infatuated creature.'

'I don't see that,' I said. 'She has always taken a great interest in Mrs. Randolph, though she has advised her foolishly.'

'We won't discuss it, my dear, this is not the time; only, take my word for it, Mrs. Penryhn is just the woman to get persons into a difficulty, and then leave them to flounder in it. But I suppose we must telegraph. Shall you do it, or I?'

'You,' I said. 'Don't let me appear more than is necessary.'

'Hush! here is Marietta,'—and Mrs. Bradshaw held up her finger as a caution.

Marietta came into the room quite calmly, and went up

to Mrs. Bradshaw and said, 'He wishes us to send for my aunt.'

It was a very strained, unnatural voice, but that was all; it did not tremble. She was not so much pale as livid; her lips were tightly drawn together; indeed, there was a rigid tension of every feature, and her eyes had a glassy, absent look, as though they conveyed no impression to the brain. The self-restraint lasted only for a few seconds. She turned and saw me, and then the whole expression of her countenance changed. She rushed forward, threw herself into my arms, and then came, oh, such a passionate burst of sorrow! I could but lay her down on the sofa, and kneel down beside her, and try to calm her by reminding her that she would unfit herself for her duty. She kept my hand clasped tight in hers, and, looking up piteously, first to me, then to Mrs. Bradshaw, she said, 'He wants to see her,—he must. He will forgive her; oh, she must come,—he can't die without it.'

'You must tell him that we are not sure where she is,' said Mrs. Bradshaw.

'But he won't understand—I can't explain—His poor mind!—Oh, it is so sad, so sad! She must come.'

'He can't be quite delirious, if he says he will forgive her,' observed Mrs. Bradshaw to me.

'No, not quite, not at all sometimes; but he wanders, and he longs for her. He took me for her once, and then when he knew me he turned away, with such a look. She must come,—indeed she must.'

'We must try to find her,' said Mrs. Bradshaw, gravely. 'Is any one belonging to Lady Chase still in Westford?'

'Mrs. Randolph is not gone to her, surely?' I said.

'I have reason to think it,' was the reply.

And Marietta pressed my hand convulsively, and murmured, 'Don't say it; he must not think it.'

‘Leave it to us, my love,’ said Mrs. Bradshaw. ‘Go back to your uncle. Tell him, what he wishes shall be done; soothe him as you best can. I will stay here. Mrs. Anstruther will go home. Trust yourself to us.’

‘And you will find her—you promise me?’

A loud-pealing bell from Mr. Randolph’s room interrupted the sentence. Marietta sprang from the sofa, and ran up the stairs.

Mrs. Bradshaw and I looked at each other in perplexity. ‘Who is to take the message to Westford?’ I said.

‘My servant shall,’ was the reply. ‘He can drive over at once.’

‘And you, of course, will stay here?’

‘Of course. I could not leave that poor child.’

‘And I can be of no use?’

‘None, so far as I can see.’

‘Then it will be better for me to go, for I am wanted at home.’ Yet I lingered. There seemed something unfeeling in thus turning away from the scene of trial.

Mrs. Bradshaw rang the bell, and gave directions about the telegram. The man was to be dispatched instantly. I thought I should like to have another glimpse of Marietta, and the very latest intelligence from Mr. Randolph’s room; and I went into the hall, and listened for the sounds above, hoping that Marietta might possibly come out of her uncle’s room again. As I turned towards the hall-door I confronted Mr. Neville and Henry Anson, who had just heard of the accident, and had ridden over from the Manor in haste, to make inquiries and offer their services. They were intensely sympathetic and interested, Mr. Neville showing the calm judgment of a superior, sensible man; Mr. Anson the excited feeling of a youth. The latter asked for Marietta, and when I said she was here I could not help noticing a slight movement on Mr. Neville’s part, as if he would have drawn him away.

‘You are sure we can do nothing?’ said Mr. Anson, inquiringly.

‘I think not; but perhaps we ought to ask the nurse.’

‘Or Miss Randolph? Won’t she see us?’

I could scarcely, even at such a moment, forbear a smile. Mr. Neville looked at the staircase, and said, ‘I think she is coming;’ and then he turned away, and addressed himself to me, whilst Henry Anson went to the foot of the stairs, in his eagerness to meet Marietta.

‘Don’t think I am taking a liberty,’ said Mr. Neville, in an undertone; ‘but surely there ought to be a man here. The nurse can’t possibly do everything Mr. Randolph may require.’

I felt ashamed that the idea had not struck me before. ‘Yes,’ I said, ‘there ought to be one, certainly; but I don’t know where to find any person, except, perhaps, the gardener; and he is such a rough, uncouth creature.’

‘I suppose I could not do any good by remaining here?’ said Mr. Neville.

‘I don’t know. Thank you very much. I am afraid it would not do.’

I spoke hurriedly, for I had a dim consciousness that the proposal was an awkward one, and at the same time I was distracted by the eager whispered conversation going on between Marietta and Mr. Anson. They both came up to me. Marietta said directly, ‘The nurse wants a man’s help to raise my uncle. He says he can’t swallow, lying down.’

Henry Anson looked imploringly for permission to go up; but, before I could give my consent, Mr. Neville had quietly stepped past us, and was half-way up the staircase. Marietta ran up after him, and Mr. Anson and I were left alone.

I felt sorry for him, very sorry; he seemed so utterly discomfited. After a few short farewell words, he mounted

his horse and rode off slowly, whilst I went back to Mrs. Bradshaw to report what had been done.

‘It is the best thing that could have happened, my dear,’ she said. ‘Not but what it is odd in some ways, but we can’t help that. It does not do to stickle for proprieties, in cases of life and death, and at any rate Lady Anson won’t quarrel with us.’

‘Then you mean Mr. Neville to stay?’ I said.

‘Certainly, if he will. A strong, sensible man may be invaluable. You know, whatever one may think of men’s moral qualities, one must own that, physically, they are our superiors.’

‘I confess I shall leave you with more comfort now,’ I said. ‘I did not at all fancy your being left alone.’

‘Neither did I; but I have a firm conviction that, whenever God sends a trial, He sends the strength to bear it. And, after all, the anxiety is nothing to me. Marietta is the one to be felt for.’

‘Yes; but she is occupied. You can only sit and wait.’

‘And think of life, and death, and hereafter; and how soon the change may come to oneself. Our prayers will be alike to-night, if they never were before.’

We parted, and I returned home to find Ina, by Drayton’s advice, gone to bed. It was the only remedy she could suggest for the nervous agitation, which the poor child was quite unable to subdue.

I told her briefly that Marietta was with her uncle, and that Mrs. Bradshaw and Mr. Neville were in the house; but I spoke only in general terms of Mr. Randolph’s condition. I doubt whether it was any definite fear which occasioned her agitation. It seemed rather, as if there had been a shock to the whole nervous system, which had stunned her. She said very little; but she liked me to read a Psalm to her, and then she asked whether Mr. L’Estrange knew what had happened. The

question startled me, suggesting an idea which certainly had crossed my own mind before, but which I had scarcely felt it was my place to bring forward. I could not, on my own responsibility, send the rector to Woodleigh; and, from Marietta's account of her uncle, I very much doubted whether Mr. Randolph was sufficiently collected and sensible to attend to anything that might be said. But there was no harm in letting Mr. L'Estrange know the state of affairs, and Stephen took a note to the parsonage for me. The answer brought back was, that the rector was not at home; it was believed that he was gone to see Mr. Randolph. I was thankful for this. Whether Mr. Randolph were in a condition to profit by the rector's services or not, yet at least Marietta would have another most true friend with her. Perhaps it would have been better to have sent for Mr. L'Estrange at once, and to have left Mr. Neville out of the question. But things are ordered for one. The very fact of not having time to think,—being obliged to decide matters in a hurry, is Providential. I was comforted, in the midst of all this worry, by seeing how entirely, in the course of the evening, Cecil had recovered from the effects of her hurried walk. Every now and then I feel a little fidgety about her. She is so soon upset; but she rallies again almost as quickly. Thinking of her, I was cheered, and, away from Woodleigh, I could not help hoping that Mr. Randolph's case might not be so serious as Mr. Heathfield thought it. I tried to recall exactly how he was lying, and where the great crush must have been,—whether upon any vital part,—but I could not precisely recollect. He must have been killed, I knew, if the whole weight of the large branch had fallen upon him; and as he was not, it must have been broken in some way.

CHAPTER XLII.

(Continuation.)

THE next morning brought me a report which confirmed my idea of the preceding evening. Mr. Randolph was still living, and conscious. Mr. Tresham had arrived, and would not allow that there was no hope. A line from Marietta herself told me this. 'God be thanked for the respite,' she wrote. 'You will pray, with me, that my poor aunt may come.' It was a dreary day—very wet. Ina remained in bed, still in a kind of stunned state. I felt as if I ought to rouse her, and yet dared not. I longed to go up to Woodleigh early, but I was obliged to attend to the children's lessons; and besides, I was anxious for the post. I thought possibly there might be a letter from Mrs. Penryhn. And there were two letters,—one for Ina, one for me. Both had been written before the telegram had been received. This was mine:—

'My dear Mrs. Anstruther,

'You will, no doubt, be surprised to hear that our poor friend Mrs. Randolph has left Arling, with the intention of spending some months on the Continent. I fear she has been led to take this step by the undesirable pressure which has been used to induce her to return to her husband. Time and gentleness might have worked marvels; but the urgency of the appeals which you and others have deemed it right to make have worked unfortunately, and, as I anticipated, in the contrary direction; and the result is, that she has fled from her truest friends, and must now be left to all the risks which such a course necessarily involves. I have

myself informed Mr. Randolph of the fact; but I think he must have been, in a measure, prepared for it; as I have never concealed from him that the strain in which he has written to his wife, added to the unwise expostulations of her too zealous friends, would be likely entirely to alienate her. I am sure you will regret, equally with myself, the result of an interference, which, however un-called-for, was, I cannot doubt, based upon good intentions; but you will, at least, have gained a painful experience, which you may hereafter turn to profit. For myself, drawing nigh my grave, and having little prospect of seeing the end of all these unhappy mistakes and misunderstandings, I can only console myself by the thought that the events of life are ordered by a Higher Wisdom than my own; and though the reconciliation which I have so earnestly desired to see is, for the present, delayed, I flatter myself that it may eventually be brought about, though I may never have the happiness of witnessing it. Pray give our fondest love to the dear children, and believe me very truly yours, 'M. PENRYHN.'

Calm, charitable, pious, most sincere, and truth-speaking Mrs. Penryhn! It is the letter of a perfect saint—an aged saint—on the brink of Eternity, and having bade adieu to all sublunary excitements, whether of pleasure or pain! I try not to be bitter, but who would not be, under such a most unlooked-for imputation? I do not allow myself to think about it. Mrs. Penryhn is right. There is a Higher Wisdom than ours, directing all these things, and to that I must commit myself.

I went to Ina, and found her sitting up in bed, with her grandmamma's letter in one hand; the other supported her head. I saw she had a difficulty in reading the writing; but when I asked if I could read the letter to her she declined at once, not in any way rudely or impatiently, but only as if such a thing could not be.

It was evident that the letter, whatever its contents might be, would have no effect upon her then, for she could not thoroughly comprehend it. The conviction made me so uneasy, that I decided at once to go to Woodleigh, and, if possible, bring back Mr. Heathfield, to see her.

I found Mrs. Bradshaw and Mr. Neville in the library. Their report was the same as Marietta's. Mr. Neville had sat up with Mr. Randolph, and Marietta had been persuaded to take a little rest. The rector had been there, late in the evening and early in the morning, but it was thought better that he should not see Mr. Randolph, whose mind still occasionally wandered; and he had therefore returned home.

'To persuade him to that was a difficult achievement on our parts, my dear,' said Mrs. Bradshaw. 'I would rather have to nurse poor Mr. Randolph than to govern the rector. Good man! He thinks himself just fitted for a sick room; and was so distressed and surprised, when I suggested to him, though in gentle words, that he pounded about like an elephant. I thought once, last evening, that he was bent upon occupying that sofa opposite, and as I had fixed upon it for myself, you see, it would have been inconvenient. I did not get rid of him till midnight, and then, I believe, he only went, because Marietta said she should not come down to me again unless I was wanted. And he was back again before I was awake, and had time to put my cap on. We are free of him now, but how long we shall remain so, I can't pretend to say.'

'But, surely,' I said, 'it will be better for Mr. Neville to have some assistance.'

'Thank you,' was Mr. Neville's rather dry reply; 'I always feel more comfortable when I can undertake my own duties. I shall lie down for an hour or two, now that Tresham is gone.'

‘What time did he go?’ I asked.

‘Not above a quarter of an hour ago.’

‘He was obliged to return by the twelve o’clock train,’ said Mrs. Bradshaw. ‘But he is hopeful.’

‘And are you?’ I asked, turning to Mr. Neville.

‘No,’ was his reply; ‘I don’t see the improvement which others do.’

‘I don’t see why one should dwell so much upon hope,’ said Mrs. Bradshaw. ‘One would think that this world was much more delightful than Paradise, by the way people talk. I have no doubt that our friend, very odd though he is, is ready for Paradise; and certainly, he is not likely to have much more happiness in this life.’

Mr. Neville looked shocked. He did not know Mrs. Bradshaw as I do. I changed the conversation, and asked if there had been any telegram from Mrs. Penryhn.

‘Yes. Mrs. Penryhn does not know Mrs. Randolph’s address; nothing more.’

‘That is awkward,’ I said. ‘Does not Mrs. Penryhn offer to make inquiries?’

‘Oh, no! why should she? What does it signify to her, whether the husband and wife meet, and are friends, or not? She is tired of the whole affair, and desires to wash her hands of it.’

‘You are a very harsh judge,’ I said.

‘Harsh, but true. Mr. Neville knows Mrs. Penryhn, and will support me.’

‘Mr. Neville, I am sure, is too cautious to risk an opinion before a stranger,’ I said; for I read in Mr. Neville’s face, that he had no intention of being thus drawn out to express his private thoughts. ‘But, anyhow, the question is, what more can we do? Marietta will never be satisfied to let things rest as they are.’

‘We must try in another direction,’ said Mrs. Bradshaw. ‘There is a person left in charge of Lady Chase’s house,

at Westford; she may know where Lady Chase is; and, I believe, Lady Chase knows where Mrs. Randolph is. That is the only clue I can suggest.'

'And who is to write to Lady Chase?' I asked.

Mrs. Bradshaw was silent for a few seconds; then she said: 'I would do it, for Marietta's sake, but the woman will infallibly leave her card upon me when next she comes into the neighbourhood. Anything, however, for that poor child!'

Mr. Neville interposed. 'Let me undertake it; let me walk into Westford, and inquire, and telegraph. Lady Chase will not leave her card upon me.'

'I won't answer for that,' exclaimed Mrs. Bradshaw. 'But you are a good Samaritan—a helper in need,—and if you will go, we shall be infinitely indebted to you.'

'And will there be anything to be done besides? Any messages—from the nurse—or Miss Randolph?'

'I think you had better go upstairs, and inquire,' said Mrs. Bradshaw, carelessly. 'You will find Marietta in the ante-room; and you may as well tell her that Mrs. Anstruther is here.'

Mr. Neville went away, creeping up the staircase so quietly, that not a footfall could be heard.

'That man is worth something,' said Mrs. Bradshaw, as we found ourselves alone. 'If he has brains in his head, which is a fact generally acknowledged, he has brains in his hands and feet, too; and really, when I look at our good rector, I begin to think that the hands and feet brains are worth more than the head brains. If you had only seen him last night,—peering about with his near-sighted eyes, insisting on making himself useful when he was not wanted; coming into the room with a hot-water bottle, which, it seems, Marietta had asked for, and which he had gone home to fetch, and putting it down upon Carlo, thinking the poor creature's back was a footstool.'

Up went his helpless hands ! The scalding water streamed over the floor from the bottle, which had been badly corked ; and when I brought a sponge and towels, to dry up the deluge, he quietly said to me, that the hot stream reminded him of one of the eruptions of Mount Vesuvius ! My dear, don't defend him. He is a Christian to the backbone—I never deny it ; but he's a trying one ; much fitter for the next world than for this. You know, we shan't want hot-water bottles there ; at least, I suppose not.'

'Hush, hush !' I exclaimed.

'No, my dear, I don't mean to hush,' replied Mrs. Bradshaw ; 'for, it is my belief, that if we could realise the fact, that Heaven is likely to be comfortable, we should be much more inclined to think about it than we are. When I was a child, my idea of Heaven was, floating about in the air ; and a friend of mine at the same age thought it was standing in a great plain, not knowing which way to go ; and another, a little boy, believed that it was sitting on an uncomfortable seat in church, listening for ever to sermons which he could not understand. Not inspiriting ideas of Heaven, those ! and I doubt whether many grown-up persons have any better ones ; so it will not, at any rate, be worse for them to think of it as a place where we shall be quite comfortable, and never need hot-water bottles.'

I tried not to laugh, but I could not help it. Mrs. Bradshaw became more serious. 'I always feel sorry,' she continued, 'when I see you put on that shocked face ; it seems to raise a kind of barrier between us. Why shouldn't you take me for what I am, and not be always imagining me something more proper ? You would not be constantly scandalised then, as you are now.'

'I don't care when we are by ourselves,' I said ; 'but I always have a fear of what other people would think if they were to hear you.'

‘Very likely; and that shows how little you know me. You don’t think I would have put forth the hot-water bottle illustration before Mrs. Harcourt, do you? But, speaking gravely, I do think we forget that the Bible tells of a new earth, as well as a new Heaven; and that if our future life is to be spiritual, as no doubt it is; yet, unquestionably, it is also to be bodily. But I can’t enter into those questions now. There is a time for all things, as Solomon says, and we are all apt to forget; and here comes Mr. Neville again. He has been a very long time receiving his messages from the nurse,—or from Marietta. Which do you think it was likely to be?’

The expression of Mr. Neville’s face struck us both directly he appeared. It was so much graver.

‘The nurse is not so well satisfied,’ he said, coming up to Mrs. Bradshaw, and speaking in a voice which was by no means free from emotion. ‘I have promised Miss Randolph that, by some means—in some way—her aunt shall be found. And yet I don’t like to leave her here without a man in the house.’

‘Send the rector to Westford,’ I said.

‘Yes, send the rector,’ said Mrs. Bradshaw.

‘But I promised Miss Randolph that I would undertake the task myself.’

‘My good friend, Marietta is not an idiot; you can’t be in two places at once.’

Mr. Neville stood undecided.

‘The rector is no use here,’ said Mrs. Bradshaw.

‘Except that Mr. Randolph may like to see him,’ I observed.

‘He is dozing now; he is still only half-conscious. The nurse thinks he is likely to go off in that way,’ observed Mr. Neville.

‘But soon?’

‘No, not soon. That makes me doubtful. I might go and return. I think I shall. I must keep my promise.’

The tread of a horse was heard on the gravel sweep. Harry Anson rode past the window, and went round to the back-yard.

‘Send him,’ I said.

‘No, no; not to Lady Chase’s house. Think of his mother.’

‘Then let him stay here, whilst you are away.’

Mr. Neville seemed ashamed of his indecision.

‘We will keep him prisoner in this room,’ said Mrs. Bradshaw, with her natural arch smile. ‘He shall not go upstairs unless he is actually needed.’

‘And you might take Mr. Anson’s horse,’ I added; ‘that would save time.’

The suggestion clenched the matter. Mr. Neville went out to arrange the exchange, and a few seconds afterwards passed the windows on his road to Westford; and, as Harry Anson informed us, intending to call at the rectory on the way, and tell Mr. L’Estrange of this sudden alteration for the worse.

I doubted, myself, whether to go or stay. Mr. Heathfield was not expected again till the afternoon. And if he did come he would probably be obliged to remain, so that it would be in vain to think of carrying him off to see Ina. Mrs. Bradshaw advised me to go back,—principally, she said, because she wished me to stay, and did not choose to decide in favour of her own inclination. Certainly, I could be of no particular use at Woodleigh, and I had many claims of duty at home: but I longed first to see Marietta. I felt she must so greatly need comfort, and I asked Mrs. Bradshaw whether she thought I might possibly venture into Mr. Randolph’s room without his recognising me.

The answer was doubtful. Mrs. Bradshaw had not gone herself, she said, for fear of rousing and disturbing him. She should advise me not; and I, very unwillingly, gave up

the idea; but when I ventured into the hall I saw the nurse standing on the landing-place at the top of the first flight of stairs, and she beckoned me up, and whispered that Miss Randolph was extremely anxious to speak to me. Could I go into the ante-room? Marietta came to me immediately.

Her first question was,—‘Have you telegraphed?’

‘We have sent to Westford for the address,’ I said; ‘at least, we hope to find it through Lady Chase.’

‘It will be too late—too late.’ The poor child sank down on a sofa, and cried bitterly.

‘He would not know her,’ I said.

‘But she would know him, and it might touch her. Oh! if she could but see him!’

‘God’s will be done,’ I said; ‘but, darling, I know how bitter this must be.’

She caught my hand, and held it firmly. ‘So bitter! Oh, you cannot tell. He was hard to you, but he loved me, and I thought he would be spared; and now he will never speak to me again—never—never.’

‘Consciousness may return, even at the very last,’ I said. ‘It often is so. I wish Mr. L’Estrange was here.’

‘He will be soon,’ was Marietta’s reply; ‘but there is a girl dying two miles off. He told me he must go to her the first thing. But my poor uncle would know my voice before any other, and I have prayed, and repeated texts, and asked him if he could understand, but he has taken no notice.’

I put my arm round her tenderly, and she leaned her head upon my shoulder, and sobbed. Presently, starting up, she hurried to the door of the bed-room, and listened.

‘I thought I heard him moan,’ she said, as she came back to me; ‘but nurse says he is quiet still. Yet surely—hark!’

There was a stir in the sick chamber. Marietta hurried from me, and I followed her. Mr. Randolph's face was towards us. The nurse was supporting him, and I saw directly that the great change had come,—that change—the precursor of death,—which, once witnessed, can never be forgotten. I do not think Marietta understood it. She drew near the bed, bent over her uncle, and entreated him to speak to her. And then the dim eyes were uplifted to her's with a perfect consciousness, and Marietta looked thankfully at me, and murmured, 'He knows me.'

Yes, I am sure he did then, know her, and me, and everything;—his own position, the certainty of the awful end that was drawing so near;—for several times he tried to speak, and the few words which we caught indicated that his mind was, at that last hour, unclouded. 'Your aunt—you will guard her for me,' I heard him murmur, and Marietta answered earnestly: 'Yes, always;' and then, she knelt by his bedside, and prayed, and his lips moved, and once we heard a feeble response. I drew the nurse aside with me, that Marietta might be with him quite alone. And I stole myself into the ante-room, and listened for an instant, in the hope that possibly the rector might be arrived. He could do no good; but this strange death-bed, apart from all the ordinary ministrations of religion, was weird and awful. I listened in vain, and then I went downstairs, and told Mrs. Bradshaw and Henry Anson of the change, and they came up with me, and we stood in the ante-room, watching, as only the living watch the dying. Marietta had no perception of our presence. She had risen from her knees, for the dying man was now apparently beyond the power of joining in prayer—his breath came slowly in gasps. I saw that Marietta knew then that the end was close at hand. She half turned to look at me, and I ventured

near, and so we stood together, unconscious of aught else but the silent approach of death. And when the last convulsive gasp was drawn, and the spirit departed to its God, it was my hand which closed the glazed eyes, whilst I whispered to Marietta, as in a burst of passionate grief she sank down by the bedside, 'God has taken one protector from you, darling; but He has given you another. You are my child now.'

The words were not spoken merely on the impulse of the moment. They were the result of long previous consideration,—of a definite fixed purpose. God give me strength to keep it.

CHAPTER XLIII.

February 30.—A fortnight since I last wrote. That last account occupied me several days, which were full, besides, of many cares and thoughts. I must condense their history.

Mrs. Randolph has not been here, though we found out her address from Lady Chase, and telegraphed immediately. Perhaps it is as well; Marietta might scarcely have stood the trial. She judges her aunt more hardly than I can do, though she feels in one sense bound to her more than ever, by her uncle's last wish; yet it will be hard to feel kindly towards her, for all the sorrows of the last months of Mr. Randolph's life are attributed to her. Poor child! she has given way under this grief more than I should have expected. The Italian element gains the upper-hand when she has no one but herself to think of, and the reaction after long self-control is great.

Mrs. Bradshaw remained with her at Woodleigh till after the funeral, which was very quiet; only a few near relations being present. Victor is left under the guardianship of his great uncle. Marietta has a legacy of two thousand pounds. Mrs. Randolph has, of course, her own fortune, and the settlement money; she will, I fancy, be very well off, if she can only be prudent. She has written a letter to Marietta, full of most excited feeling, and self-reproach, but there is nothing practical in it; no idea that she ought to come back to England, and make a home for Marietta, which is really her duty. She is the most absolute self-deceiver I ever met with.

She says that 'she is too miserable to bear the coldness of English life and the dreariness of an English climate; that her little income will go much further abroad; and that, as she is now amongst kind and sympathising friends, she considers that it will be wise to remain with them for the present. Marietta will, no doubt, be able to find a temporary home with those who are so fondly attached to her at Dernham, and who will, doubtless, be only too glad to have her with them. The future may be left to itself; and Marietta must only look upon this announcement as necessary for the time being.'

I do not myself believe that this letter is entirely Mrs. Randolph's; it is too openly selfish and unfeeling. Lady Chase, I suspect, has had a hand in it, and Mrs. Randolph has been unable to resist her. To Lady Chase it is an object of the greatest moment to keep Mrs. Randolph with her, and make use of her; and she would very easily persuade her, weak as she is, to make no move at present, and leave Marietta to find a home where she can; colouring her ultimate intentions by the assertion, that it is only a temporary arrangement. Thus to live from hand to mouth; paying to-day's debts of duty with the good intentions of to-morrow, is the special characteristic of those, who, like Mrs. Randolph, are too weak to face an unpleasant obligation, and yet too true and conscientious to put it aside.

The idea of this temporary home tries me very much, I must confess. The one thing I long for in life is, certainty—I mean a modified human certainty, whether for good or evil; probably that is the precise reason why it has so seldom been allowed me. Till Mrs. Randolph's letter came, I had taken it for granted that Marietta could not possibly, under any circumstances, go to her; that the vicinity of Lady Chase would be quite sufficient to negative such an idea; and so I had indulged myself in

plans—perhaps I must call them daydreams,—in which Marietta, as my adopted child, was to bear a principal part. And I had gone farther—I had even tried to cheer Marietta by them. During the few days which elapsed before the funeral, I spent part of every afternoon with her, whilst Mrs. Bradshaw went home, to see, as she said, whether her grandchildren had burnt down her house, or thrown the furniture out of window; and, during that time, we discussed all kinds of pleasant employments, studies, duties,—and once or twice I elicited quite a bright smile of pleasure. But since the arrival of Mrs. Randolph's letter, we both have felt as though the future was covered with a black cloud, which might, at any moment, burst in a storm.

Let Lady Chase and Mrs. Randolph quarrel—as two such people must do, sooner or later,—and let Mrs. Randolph return to England, and it may, probably it would be, Marietta's positive duty, to go to her. We had formed a little plan of letting the cottage, and spending a few weeks in Normandy, in the summer; but now we dare not look forward so long. Marietta distresses herself, because she says that I shall put myself to trouble and inconvenience to receive her, and then, when she is settled with me, she may be hurried away again; but I will not let her dwell upon this, and I promise not to put myself to any inconvenience, or,—as I know she really means,—expense, on her account. The few little alterations which will be required, to make her room what she would like, are to be done entirely under her own orders. But when we had agreed upon this, there were so many pecuniary questions to be settled, and Marietta was so perplexed about some of her own affairs, that I don't know how we should have managed without the aid of Mrs. Bradshaw and the rector. Mrs. Bradshaw was most amusing in her way of treating the matter.

‘My dear,’ she said to me yesterday, ‘the nearer and dearer your friends are, the more particular you should be in keeping exact accounts with them; that is my experience. Everyone makes everyone pay heavy interest for over-generosity. It is human nature; and if you are over generous to Marietta, or Marietta is over generous to you, you will, either of you, expect to receive the interest in love; and love which is claimed, too often, is not ready when due. In a case like the present, the only thing to be done is to put your affairs into the hands of some mutual friend who understands business, and let him arrange for you. What do you say to my son?’

I should have agreed, for, although I know very little of Colonel Bradshaw, I give him credit for being a sensible, as well as an honourable man, and he would be entirely disinterested. Marietta, however, did not quite like this idea. Colonel Bradshaw is, like his mother, brusque and outspoken; and Marietta is almost morbidly sensitive about her personal affairs. She could not, I saw, endure to hear them discussed as they would be if the Colonel had the management of them. And then he would be certain to tell his wife, and though she is a dear little amiable woman, she is not over gifted with discretion; and so Marietta felt that the questions as to what ought to be my share, and what ought to be hers, in the choice of new furniture, &c., might, unintentionally, become a subject of gossip for the neighbourhood. She confided these fears to me, and then proposed leaving all things to be settled between myself and Mr. L'Estrange, who, in spite of his oddities, is really a good man of business. Mrs. Bradshaw, being the most unselfish and least touchy of human beings, was not at all annoyed at this suggestion; but she could not avoid a little banter.

‘Certainly, my dear,’ she said, ‘if Marietta likes it best, there can be no reason against it; only she must be

prepared;—the poor man will consider it nothing less than a preliminary step,—a petition first to take care of ‘my private concerns,’ then to take care of ‘myself.’ She would have been safe in that way with my son, for he has a wife already, and I don’t see any Bluebeard symptoms which would make me suppose he wishes to get rid of her. But the rector will be in the seventh heaven of felicity, and as I don’t think he is likely, in a hurry, to have the chance of being there again, why, it would be cruel to deny him this opportunity of seeing what it is like.’

There was some truth in Mrs. Bradshaw’s words. I saw this by the expression of the rector’s face, when I asked him whether he would kindly undertake to help Marietta with his advice. It gave him an excuse for being at Woodleigh every day whilst Marietta remained there; and she was so grateful, and trusting, and confidential, that really I could not help thinking, every now and then, whether it might not be possible for her to look at him in a tenderer light than that of a kind friend. There are no symptoms of it; but yet, as the saying is, ‘she might go farther and fare worse.’ Unquestionably he is infinitely superior to Henry Anson. That name brings me back to the outer world, the world, I mean, outside the all-engrossing private interests of the last few weeks. Mr. Anson was mixed up with them singularly. The fact of being actually present at Mr. Randolph’s death, gave him, as he fancied, a right to consider himself one of the family. He was constantly at the house, trying to make himself useful; and insisted upon being present at the funeral. I was told by Mr. Neville that Lady Anson very strongly objected to this last action, and that Mrs. Harcourt read him a regular lecture upon connecting himself openly with a name that had lately been so discreditably before the public; an exaggeration which naturally enough ruined her cause, for Mr. Anson

decidedly denied the fact, and persisted in his intention, and appeared at the funeral. Mr. Neville also was there; but, with greater taste than young Anson, he has kept away from Woodleigh entirely, only calling to inquire for Marietta at the door. He and Mr. Anson start on their tour next week, I believe. Captain Shaw has been very deeply moved by this sudden death of a man so much younger than himself. He lives, I am sure, in the ever present realisation of the nearness of his own death; so much so, indeed, that it seems wonderful and unnatural to find anyone taken before him. He has been a great comfort to Marietta, for his long friendship with Mr. Randolph has enabled him to give her many details, which show, what I was already convinced of, that the singular prejudice and harshness of Mr. Randolph's character were really only excrescences, as it were; that the fundamental principle was, a desire to live to God. Marietta showed me one day a book of written prayers which she had found—so deeply penitential and devotional, and showing such a consciousness of his own faults, and such a humble trust in the one Atonement, they were a great self-reproach to me, when I thought how hardly I had been inclined to judge him. And yet if, as somebody—Miss Edgeworth I think—says, 'to make virtue disagreeable is to commit high treason against it,' the offence must surely be greater in the case of religion. How one turns to the thought of the Day when all these things will be made clear, and one shall see these mixed characters, 'partly iron and partly clay,' as they really are. It is an inexpressible comfort to think of Mr. Randolph as a good man; and yet, I pray most earnestly, that none whom I love may ever have to answer for similar faults.

Marietta comes to me as a permanence to-morrow; she has not been able to leave Woodleigh before, there has been so much to arrange. Old Mr. William Randolph,

the great uncle, to whose guardianship Victor is left, has sent a solicitor to examine into the property, and to give directions for selling the furniture, and letting the house. Eventually that also will be sold, so that everything has had to be looked over and disposed of. My own special private care, all this time, has been Ina; and yet, perhaps I am wrong to call it care, for I have cause for much thankfulness. The dear child has indeed by no means recovered her usual strength; she has lost her brightness, and sits silent and abstracted. Even the prospect of having Marietta with her has seemed to give her pleasure only at intervals. But I cannot help seeing in her daily life the evidence that the shock which has thus saddened, has also greatly improved her. I wish she would talk to me; perhaps that will come by-and-by. What I notice now, is a careful self-control as to temper, a constant watchfulness with regard to my wishes, and, what I value more than all, an endeavour to be simply straightforward;—not in any way to evade or make excuses. I know it will not do to build too much upon this improvement. It would have been impossible for any one at Ina's age, and with her easily excited feelings, to have been brought so suddenly and closely in contact with such an awful catastrophe, and not to have been impressed by it. The effect produced may pass away, though I pray earnestly it may not; but I cannot help having a hope of its being lasting, when I see that it is worked out in action. Ina has hitherto been so impatient, and neglectful in trifles, whilst taking such delight in everything which is noble and grand, in feeling and word; that I have often felt certain she was deceiving herself, and I am learning more and more to dread self-deception. I used to think that it was not compatible with truth in word and action, but I begin to believe that to a certain extent it is. Mrs. Randolph, for instance, as Mrs. Bradshaw asserts, is not what is called

untrue ; she would never tell a falsehood, or deliberately deceive ; but she has never yet faced her own faults, or her own motives—that I am convinced of.

But I will not think of her. God grant Ina may never in any way resemble her.

CHAPTER XLIV.

February 12.—Marietta is here. She has been with me two days. I have left her now with Ina and Cecil, giving them an Italian lesson. I could believe that she had lived with me for months; she has glided into her place so entirely without effort. But we keep upon the surface of feeling. She talked to me freely at Woodleigh before the funeral; life then was sad and sacred. Now we are, outwardly, as we were, and no wonder that she cannot bring her secret sorrow to the light. But when I say, that we keep upon the surface of feeling, I am not quite correct. Marietta can speak, and has spoken, of deeper things, but they have not concerned herself. I had a long conversation with her last night about Ina. It almost made me envious. The feeling which has been shut up from me, has expanded itself freely with Marietta. It is natural. One must learn that these young things will give confidence to each other, which they can never give to those of whom they stand in any way in awe.

But I have so tried not to be awful;—to be very loving, and tender, and sympathetic, even when I felt most annoyed. Ina little knows the restraint I have put upon myself, in my endeavours not to exaggerate the faults which have lately been so painfully evident. But I suppose the mere fact that I recognise certain actions as faults, and have a right to reprove them, is enough to awaken some awe.

At any rate, I must learn to be content with what I can get in the way of confidence, and to be grateful for

obtaining an insight into Ina's mind, even though it may be through the medium of a third person. Marietta, in talking to me, was very careful not to betray confidence, and I was equally careful not to lead her to do so unintentionally.

Trust is the foundation stone of confidence. Take it away, and the edifice falls to the ground; and if Ina were to imagine that everything she said to Marietta was necessarily to be repeated to me, there would be an end of all free intercourse.

But I did learn from Marietta, in general words, that Ina has been thinking most deeply and seriously lately, and has taken a very different view of her past life from that which she entertained before.

'Ina reproaches herself so very much,' said Marietta to me, as we were talking together last night, 'for having caused you so much pain. She says that she never felt how much you must have had to bear from misrepresentation, till that day when you were in the cottage with—' she paused.

'Yes,' I said, 'I knew Ina felt for me then.'

'And he never did you justice,' said Marietta, sadly. 'He would have done so,—he would have acknowledged he was wrong, if the truth could only have been put before him.'

'As it will be some day, my child,' I replied. 'We will not trouble ourselves about that now. When we all meet, as we trust we shall hereafter, perhaps one of our greatest happinesses will be the clearing up of misunderstandings. But what I should like Ina to feel would be rather pain for herself than for me. I should be glad to think that she herself felt, and owned, her absence of strict obedience and straightforwardness.'

Marietta only half liked to hear the accusation made in plain words; but she said, 'She does feel it, I know, you

would be certain of it if you had heard her talk ; but I cannot repeat everything.'

'No,' I replied, 'of course not. But Marietta, you will do Ina infinite service, if you can help her to bear this fault of hers in mind constantly. She has had an impression made upon her, but it may wear off.'

'Ina says that all things seem changed to her,' replied Marietta.

'And, no doubt, they are; no doubt, also, that they will never again appear exactly what they were before.'

'She feels as if she had grown so old,' continued Marietta.

'Yes; and she has done so. The first near contact with death adds ten years to our age. But, Marietta, the one thing that Ina needs, is the turning of the whole will to God,—the desire to serve Him first and last, and in everything.'

'I think her will is turned,' was the reply. 'She does pray so very earnestly.'

'Thank you for telling me that,' I said. 'There is more hope in prayer than in good resolutions, though the latter are very needful.'

'But people are converted suddenly,' observed Marietta, thoughtfully.

'Sometimes, no doubt; but the proof of conversion is action; and Ina has so often been deceived by her own good feelings, that I am afraid lest she should be so again.'

'But when people leave off all their bad ways, and turn round, and become quite different,' said Marietta, 'there is no fear of their going back again,—is there?'

I could scarcely avoid a smile at the question. It involved such a deep theological controversy. All I could say in reply, was, 'I think the Bible tells us to "work out our salvation with fear and trembling." There would be no cause for fear and trembling if it were

impossible to go back. And certainly, Marietta, there is such a thing as exchanging one sin for another. As Jeremy Taylor says, somewhere: "a man may give up drunkenness, and take to pride." That cannot be conversion.'

'I don't understand,' said Marietta.

'That is to say, my dear, you are perplexed, as we all must be, by the deceitfulness of the human heart. There is but one motive principle really to be depended on, and when love for the Love which has purchased salvation, and given it to us, becomes the spring of Ina's actions, I shall have no more fear for her.'

I think Marietta only partially entered into what I said. She has never, I suspect, had much definite teaching on these subjects, but religion has grown up with her unconsciously, and in such sincerity, that she has never had experience of the difficulties which beset others. Conversion, or repentance, or good resolutions, are accepted by her as, in all cases, *bonâ fide* realities. She does not understand what it is to give a half-will to anything. She believes now, that Ina is absolutely changed, that her faults are uprooted, and that she will henceforth live entirely to God. She told me this in so many words, and if one had had no experience of human weakness and inconstancy, there would be good reason to agree with her. My dear child is changed,—sobered, awakened, deepened in principle. I thank God for it, from the very bottom of my heart. But Ina is Ina still,—and the conflict with the old nature will continue to the end of life.

CHAPTER XLIV.

February 14.—To-morrow is the Confirmation day. Mr. L'Estrange has been here, talking about the arrangements,—talking, also, about the children.

These few last weeks have brought us into real intimacy. We have learnt to know each other, through Marietta. A good man's mind is very resting and helpful to a woman. It has a depth, and strength, and quiet self-confidence, which, though a woman may, to a certain degree, acquire, from necessity and responsibility, is seldom or never natural to her. In dealing with the rector, I take his peculiarities for granted, and make allowance for them, and then I can do justice to his sterling excellencies; otherwise, I should find myself repelled by his oddities, and should never get on with him at all. One thing which strikes me in him, is his nobleness of character, his generosity, his power of disinterested kindness and love. I suspect those are the peculiar characteristics of a man's better nature. There is none of the rankling pettiness, which women too often betray. As an instance:—

I can see—it would be impossible not to see—that the rector's interest in Marietta is tenfold greater than her interest in him. I don't believe he is exactly in love with her; I am sure it has never entered his head, that it would be possible to marry. He does not, indeed, as I am convinced, know what he feels for her, but that her presence makes life a totally different thing to him, from what it would be without her, I am absolutely certain.

And she, in her child-like simplicity, must give him such continual disappointment—one moment, talking to him with the most unreserved freedom, with really affectionate confidence; and then turning away from him, and rushing off to be with Ina and Cecil, never supposing, for an instant, that he can really care for her conversation. He tries to forget the difference of age, but she constantly alludes to it, putting him on a par with me, and with the persons who have a right to guide and direct her; and I am sure that, without exactly knowing why, he does not like this. He is not vain, so he does not resent it; but it chills him, and, sometimes, I see him become quite silent, suddenly, and a blank, sad look steals over his face; and then he says something mournful, yet very kind, and free from anything like pique,—and Marietta gazes up, wonderingly, and tells him she is so grateful, so very much obliged,—she looks upon him as her best friend. But, poor man! it does not comfort him, he is sad still, and kinder, and more thoughtful for her, and then she becomes confidential and affectionate again, and he brightens. He did not, however, say much about Marietta to-day; our conversation was chiefly about Ina and Cecil. He does not do Cecil justice. That is natural; he cannot make her talk to him, and she does not know how to express her feelings; really, I believe, because she is so absolutely simple, that she does not think about herself, or understand that there are any feelings to talk about. A girl's mind, is, I imagine, such an enigma to most men, that they cannot tell how to reach it, without assistance; and when they meet with anyone who will talk about her faults, and make confessions, it is such a help to the good men, that they do not discover the vanity and romance, which, in nine cases out of ten, are hidden under the guise of self-condemnation. Ina has been very open with Mr.

L'Estrange. He is delighted with her; and I—I wish that she had felt a little more shy with him, and talked to me. But, at any rate, the feeling created is, unquestionably, genuine, at the present moment, and Ina will go to her Confirmation in a very different frame of mind from that which I had feared. She is, for the time being, entirely in earnest, and very practical. But, I must keep a watch over the idea she has now, that it will be so very helpful to continue the readings with the rector, because it will give her an opportunity of talking to him about her progress, and receiving his advice. Excellent man! learned in Hebrew and Greek, and thoroughly competent to discuss the interpretation of difficult passages of Scripture, yet, he can never have the experience that I have of Ina's shortcomings; and, as he will receive the account of them only from herself, and she cannot be trusted (who could be?) as a witness against herself, it is simply impossible that he can be always a wise director. I say nothing at the present moment, and, if the Bible classes are confined to explanations of Scripture, and subjects relating to the Church, generally, I shall be thankful to let the two girls attend them; but, if they are to be the excuse for private conversations which are likely to be the incentive to spiritual vanity, I shall certainly throw cold water upon the idea. If the rector were one whit less simple-minded than he is, I could tell him plainly what my fear is; but he would listen to me with amazement, and if he put any construction at all upon my words, it would, probably, be one quite different from their real meaning.

There could be no harm—not the shadow of harm, in the strict sense of the word—in Ina's talking to him privately, every day, and all day long; but, instead of doing her good, it would, infallibly, tend to morbid self-consciousness, and spiritual excitement. Turn the rector

into a sensible old woman, and then see whether there would be the same earnest desire, on Ina's part, for his counsel!

My dear Cecil says—what she does say—to me; it is very little, very general; condensed, usually, into 'I know I am so very bad,' and 'I long to be so very good;' but the bright, honest, earnest, little face tells its own tale, and cannot be doubted. Only once has she been more detailed in her confessions. I begged both Ina and her to tell me if they had anything, especially, upon their consciences; any past offence, which they felt to be a burden. Young things, sometimes, bear a load of this kind upon their minds, for years, and it checks all the spring and brightness of their religious life. Ina said there was nothing in particular; but Cecil wrote me a little note, for she said she could write better than talk, and, in it, confessed a small act of dishonesty, which she had been led into, when she was a very little thing, at Arling, and had never been able to forget. We had some talk about it, afterwards, and she told me that she felt happier than she had ever been since the offence was committed. It was such a comfort to have it known.

Eleven o'clock, P.M.—I went to the children's room, as I often do, to kiss them, if they are awake, and found Ina not yet in bed. I could say nothing about her being late, for she had, evidently, been reading and praying. The traces of tears were on her cheeks; she turned to me, I could see, with a full heart, and exclaimed, 'Oh, mamma! I thought you would come, and I longed for you! I wanted you to say, once more, that you had quite forgiven all!'

My only answer was a hearty kiss, and then I took her into my own room, and we sat down by the fire, and had a short, but very free and candid conversation. I spoke quite plainly of my fears of self-deception. I put Ina's

character before her, in the plainest words, and prepared her for what she will infallibly find, that to-morrow's rite, and the more sacred one which is to follow, are, in no sense, magical charms, which will enable her to subdue her faults without an effort. The earnestness which she takes with her, will be blessed and strengthened, but if there is but little earnestness, there can be but little blessing.

Cecil was asleep; she lay with her hand above her head, like an infant, and on the pillow was a little book of hymns, on which her fingers rested.

Drayton told me afterwards that she had begged to be allowed to read one or two favourites, and afterwards to have her candle taken away,—because, as she said, she wanted to go to sleep with good thoughts, and then, perhaps, God would let her wake with them.

* * * * *

February 15.—My darlings are confirmed. May God make both me and them thankful for His great mercy.

As is so often the case, it has been a day of much excitement, and some confusion and worry. One always intends a Confirmation day to be very quiet, and it seldom or never is. Marietta was the greatest help to me; I don't know what I should have done without her. The service was in the afternoon, which in itself was unsettling, because the morning had to be got through, as it were; and I knew the children could not possibly keep their minds fixed upon the one subject all the time, and yet would fancy it wrong to attend to anything else. I left them no choice, however, which might burden their consciences. We had our usual reading together, and then I made Cecil draw, and Ina practise her music, and sent them out into the garden for half-an-hour (happily, it was a fine day), and so the greater part of the morning passed away; and they had another half-an-hour to them-

selves before dinner. But that was the trying time for me; for the Fowlers (some new people who have taken a house at Easthope, about three miles from us) took it into their heads to return a visit I paid last week with Mrs. Bradshaw. They were, as they said, obliged to drive into Westford for the Confirmation of their second daughter, and so they thought they might as well call on their way. So very strange people are! To choose such a time for a morning visit! Mrs. Fowler gave me a very broad hint that they had left home early, without any luncheon, and would not be sorry for some; so that I really could not, in common courtesy, avoid inviting them to stay when the dinner-bell rang. And thus there were three persons, in addition to our usual party; and the small dining-room was crowded, and there really was scarcely enough to eat, for we had no regular joint. But the conversation was the worst thing. It was gossiping, in spite of all my efforts to introduce safe topics; and things were said about the Harcourts, and some dress which had been ordered from London expressly for Alice Harcourt's Confirmation, which annoyed me more than I can say. It brought on a discussion about veils and caps, and at last Mrs. Fowler insisted upon having a box brought in, which contained a beautiful veil her daughter was to put on when they reached the church; and the veil was unpacked and exhibited upon the young lady, and then tried upon Ina and Cecil, with a running comment of regret that they were to have only plain caps. I sent the two girls away long before the time at which the carriage had been ordered, that they might be able to bring their minds into a better tone. And then Marietta, with charming tact, took the task of entertainment upon herself, and found an excuse for me to leave the room; and really managed so well, that I was not obliged to go into the drawing-room again, except for a few minutes just before Mrs. Fowler went away.

My fear had been, that, in some way, we should be mixed up together, and forced to go as one party ; but this, too, Marietta contrived to avoid, advising Mrs. Fowler to go very early, in order to escape any crush at the door. To my infinite relief, we were really left to ourselves at the last, and I had a few quiet moments with the children before we started ; and was able to say, what is always in my mind when I am especially anxious about them, that I feel I have a double responsibility in their care, because I must one day restore them, not only to their father, but to their own mother. I have never allowed this idea to be forgotten, and so it is easy to allude to it. They speak to me now quite naturally about their mother ; and Cecil said to me to-day : ‘ Do you think she sees us ? ’ It was a difficult question, and I could only answer : ‘ She may ; but, if she should not, yet there must come a Day when she will hear and know everything ; and so we will all pray that there may be nothing in this afternoon’s service which will then give her pain.’

I drove into Westford in good time with the three children,—for I took Agnes with me ;—Marietta having arranged to go with Mrs. Bradshaw, who called for her soon after we were gone.

We were separated as soon as we reached the church, but I managed to obtain a very good place, where I could see both the nave and the chancel. If the occasion had not been so solemn, and if one’s thoughts had not been differently engaged, one might have found considerable amusement in looking at the curious specimens of taste in the way of veils, and caps ; and head-dresses, which did not pretend to cover the head. I wish something could be done to ensure uniformity and simplicity on these occasions. The little bits of finery worn by some of the girls, and their evident self-consciousness, were painful. And then they have to wait so long before the service begins, and

very few of them have been told how to employ thoughts, so that they are almost obliged to look about, merely '*pour passer le temps.*' I was thankful to see my two children reading or kneeling the whole time. The rector had given them a general charge, and I had ventured to add a few more details, and had chosen Psalms and passages of Scripture which they might read. Ina told me afterwards that she was inexpressibly thankful, for she was sure that it would have been impossible otherwise to keep her mind fixed. I suppose one must always recognise the fact, that assemblies of people, met for whatever purpose, have a tendency to dissipation. One knows oneself the half-worldly, half-devotional pleasure which a great Church Festival will give; and in Confirmation there must almost necessarily be more or less self-consciousness in the young people, who are objects of interest to everyone about them.

It is not at all pleasant to acknowledge this, and, so long as I was only a spectator on such occasions, I never allowed myself to own the fact. But now that I have to bear a part in them, or, at least, to teach others how to do so, I have forced myself to awake from my dream, and view things as they really are. And, after all, this is the most satisfactory way of taking life, in all its phases. I was much more really happy, as I looked at Ina and Cecil, and felt that I was not expecting from them a higher degree of devotion than they would be able to attain, than I should have been if I had been indulging in visions of Utopian piety for the last two months. For, in fact, I was very much more pleased with them than I had anticipated. It may have been my own partiality, but I saw none whose appearance and manner I liked as well. Earnest, simple, devotional, apparently thinking of nothing but the solemnity of the moment,—I never once saw their eyes wander curiously

around, or marked anything, in the slightest degree, approaching to negligence or irreverence. I did not, indeed, watch them the whole time, for, when once I was comfortably placed, and found that I was not likely to be disturbed by other persons, I was glad to get the opportunity for my own private devotions; which would have been more resting and happy if I could have got over my unfortunate English shyness. I believe that a great deal of the irreverence which is commented upon by foreigners, and confessed by ourselves, arises from shyness, or rather, self-consciousness. We are so very painfully aware of what everyone will say and think of us. And when the people near were moving, and looking about, and whispering, it seemed as if it must excite notice to kneel, and say one's prayers, even though one was in church. Agnes, I really believe, is free from any weakness of this kind. It made me quite ashamed of myself, to see her entire absorption in the spirit of the scene and of the service. There is something in a naturally devotional mind like hers, which it is inexpressibly elevating and purifying to observe. No doubt, it has its dangers; it may become morbid and exaggerated, but it is a gift. Others may acquire it, to a certain extent, by prayer and watchfulness, just as they may acquire simplicity; but the fresh, pure spirit of instinctive devotion, as one occasionally meets with it, has a charm which nothing acquired ever can equal. To such a mind Christianity is a necessity; the element in which it breathes; without which it must die. I wonder what Deists and Pantheists would make of my little Agnes, if they had to educate her. She would be a perplexity to them, and I am sure they would be a perplexity to her; for there would be one portion of her being—if one may so say—involving cravings and needs, imperiously demanding satisfaction, which they would be totally unable

to reach. Imagine attempting to make her happy by talking to her of the immortality of Force; or the absorption of her own individuality into the Being of the Author of Nature! Yet minds like hers are facts, just as much as physical phenomena are facts. It is impossible for a sound philosophy to ignore them.

How I am wandering away! But events like that of to-day set one thinking.

The Confirmation service is too short, though it is high treason against the Prayer-book to say so. I should like to have the Baptismal vow repeated at length in the bishop's question, and the answers given separately, as in the Baptismal service. To-day we had a very impressive preliminary address from the Bishop. Ina and Cecil's gaze was riveted upon him. I think they both forgot everything but the one solemn thought of self-dedication. Ina passed close to me, as she went to the altar, and her eyes were glistening. Cecil looked only very nervous, and very flushed. I watched them as they came back, and longed, though I did not venture to pray, that they might ever remain as they were at that moment.

The second address was short, but very inspiriting and comforting; and after that came the few concluding prayers;—and then the rush of the world, like the tide of the sea pouring in upon a shelving shore.

Oh! how one longs to grasp some moments of one's life:—some of those higher, holier moments,—and bid them die—if die they must—lingeringly, gently.

I waited till nearly everyone was gone, and the roll of carriages and the sound of voices had ceased, when I wrapped my children up in their cloaks, and gave one hearty pressure of the hand to Mrs. Bradshaw, and a loving smile to Marietta, and we drove off. I kissed my darlings, but we did not speak till we reached home.

Then, as we stood in the hall, Ina turned to me, and said with intense earnestness, 'Mamma, it would never have been what it was but for you;' and Cecil, with the tears streaming down her cheeks, laid her head on my neck, and whispered, 'It was so happy. If it would but last.'

* * * * *

It was a wish which will surely have its fulfilment. But how?

I look at the blank pages of my journal and think of what hereafter I may have to write there—yet I do not tremble.

'My times are in Thy hand.'

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INDEX.

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Alcock's Residence in Japan.....	25	Exposition 39 Articles.....	18
Alfred on Formation of Christendom.....	20	Pentateuch.....	18
Alpine Guide (The).....	22	Boeckle's History of Civilization.....	2
Apjohn's Manual of the Metalloids.....	12	Bull's Hints to Mothers.....	28
Arago's Biographies of Scientific Men.....	5	Maternal Management of Children.....	28
Popular Astronomy.....	10	Boswell's Ancient Egypt.....	3
Arnold's Manual of English Literature.....	7	Boswell on Apocrypha.....	20
Arnot's Elements of Physics.....	11	Boswell's Vicissitudes of Families.....	5
Arundines Cami.....	25	Burton's Christian Church.....	3
Atherstone Priory.....	23		
Autumn holidays of a Country Parson.....	8		
Atter's Treasury of Bible Knowledge.....	19		
		Cabinet Lawyer.....	24
Bacon's Essays, by Whately.....	5	Calvert's Wife's Manual.....	21
Life and Letters, by Spedding.....	5	Campaigner at Home.....	18
Works.....	5	Cats' and Fables's Moral Emblems.....	16
Bain on the Emotions and Will.....	10	Choral Book for England.....	21
on the Senses and Intellect.....	10	Cloven's Lives from Plutarch.....	2
on the Study of Character.....	10	Colenso (Bishop) on Pentateuch and Book	19
Bairner's Explorations in S. W. Africa.....	22	of Joshua.....	19
Ball's Alpine Guide.....	13	Collins's Horse-Tracker's Guide.....	26
Barnard's Drawing from Nature.....	16	Columbus's Voyages.....	23
Baylton's Rents and Tillages.....	18	Commonplace Philosopher in Town and	8
Beaten Tracks.....	23	Country.....	8
Boswell's Characters and Gallus.....	24	Conington's Translation of Virgil's <i>Æneid</i>	25
Brethoven's Letters.....	4	Contansau's Pocket French and English	8
Berney's Sanskrit Dictionary.....	8	Dictionary.....	8
Berry's Journals and Correspondence.....	4	Practical ditto.....	8
Black's Treatise on Brewing.....	28	Conybeare and Howson's Life and Epistles	18
Blackley and Friedlander's German and	11	of St. Paul.....	18
English Dictionary.....	8	Cook on the Acts.....	18
Blaine's Rural Sports.....	26	Cook's Voyages.....	23
Veterinary Art.....	26	Copland's Dictionary of Practical Medicine	15
Blight's Week at the Land's End.....	23	Abridgment of ditto.....	15
Boase's Essay on Human Nature.....	9	Cox's Tales of the Great Persian War.....	2
Philosophy of Nature.....	9	Tales from Greek Mythology.....	24
Booth's Epigrams.....	9	Tales of the Gods and Heroes.....	24
Boner's Transylvania.....	22	Tales of Thebes and Argos.....	17
Bourne on Screw Propeller.....	17	Cressy's Encyclopedia of Civil Engineering	14
Bourne's Catechism of the Steam Engine.....	17	Critical Essays of a Country Parson.....	4
Handbook of Steam Engine.....	17	Crowe's History of France.....	2
Treatise on the Steam Engine.....	17	Crumpe on Banking, Currency, & Exchanges	27
Bowdler's Family Shakespeare.....	25	Cusane's Grammar of Heraldry.....	16
Boyd's Manual for Naval Cadets.....	27		
Bramley-Moore's Six Sisters of the Valleys	24	Dant's Iliad of Homer.....	25
Brand's Dictionary of Science, Literature,	13	Darman's Dante's Divine Commedia.....	25
and Art.....	13	D'Aubigne's History of the Reformation in	2
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Philosophy of Necessity.....	10	Dead Shot (The), by Marryman.....	26
on Force.....	10	De la Rive's Treatise on Electricity.....	11
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		of the Idiomatic.....	15

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Elements of Botany	12	Hudson's Executor's Guide	38
Ellice, a Tale	23	Directions for Making Wills	39
Ellicott's Broad and Narrow Way	19	Hughes's (A.) Garden Architecture	18
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Essays and Reviews	20		
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Compendium of ditto	19	Germanica	16, 21
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Hoskyns's Taina	18	Mystica	21
Occasional Essays	9	Sacra	21
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		Lays of Ancient Rome	25

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MACPHEE'S Vancouver Island	23	PELLIPS'S Guide to Geology	11
MACQUIE'S Life of Father Mathew	4	Introduction to Mineralogy	12
Rome and its Rulers	4	FISKE'S Art of Perfumery	18
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MANNING on Holy Ghost	20	Magic	18
MARSHMAN'S Life of Havelock	6	PIKE'S English and their Origin	9
MARSHY'S History of England	1	PIRE on Brewing	26
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MAY'S Constitutional History of England	1	Cricketiana	24
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General Bounce	24	Recreations of a Country Parson	6
Gladiators	24	REILLY'S Map of Mont Blanc	12
Good for Nothing	24	RIVERS'S Rose Amateur's Guide	23
Holmby House	24	ROOSAS'S Correspondence of Greyson	9
Interpreter	24	Eclipse of Faith	9
Kate Coventry	24	Defence of ditto	9
Queen's Maids	24	Essays from the <i>Edinburgh Review</i>	9
MENDELSSOHN'S Letters	4	Fulleriana	9
MENIER'S Windsor Great Park	18	Reason and Faith	9
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(C.) Fall of the Roman Republic	3	Phrases	7
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Romans under the Empire	2	ROWTON'S Debater	7
MILES on Horse's Foot and Horseshoeing	26	RUSSELL on Government and Constitution	1
ON HORSES' Teeth and Stables	26		
MILL on Liberty	6	SANDARS'S Justinian's Institutes	5
on Representative Government	6	SCOTT'S Handbook of Volumetrical Analysis	14
on Utilitarianism	6	SCHROPE on Volcanoes	11
MILL'S Dissertations and Discussions	6	SEWELL'S Amy Herbert	23
Political Economy	6	Earl's Daughter	23
System of Logic	6	Examination for Confirmation	20
Hamilton's Philosophy	6	Experience of Life	23
MILLER'S Elements of Chemistry	14	Gertrude	23
MONSIELL'S Spiritual Songs	21	Glimpse of the World	23
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Language	7	Thoughts for the Holy Week	20
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Greece	2	SEAW'S Work on Wine	26
MURCHISON on Continued Fevers	14	SEEDEN'S Elements of Logic	6
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		Short Whist	28
New Testament, Illustrated with Wood En-		SHORT'S Church History	3
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SMITH on Cavalry Drill and Manœuvres....	26	VAUGHAN's (R.) Revolutions in English History.....	1
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STANLEY's History of British Birds.....	13	VAUGHAN's (R. A.) Hours with the Mystics.....	10
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STIRLING's Secret of Hegel.....	10	WEBSTER & WILKINSON's Greek Testament.....	19
STONEHENGE on the Dog.....	27	WELLS's Florence.....	22
on the Greyhound.....	15	WELLINGTON's Life, by BRIALMONT and GLEIG.....	4
STRANGE on Sea Air.....	15	by GLEIG.....	4
on Restoration of Health.....	15	WEST on Children's Diseases.....	14
Sunday Afternoons at the Parish Church..	8	WHATELY's English Synonyms.....	5
TASSO's Jerusalem, by JAMES.....	24	Logic.....	5
TAYLOR's (Jeremy) Works, edited by EDEN.....	20	Remains.....	5
TENNENT's Ceylon.....	12	Rhetoric.....	5
Natural History of Ceylon.....	12	Life and Correspondence.....	4
Wild Elephant.....	12	Paley's Moral Philosophy.....	21
THIRLWALL's History of Greece.....	2	WHEWELL's History of the Inductive Sciences.....	3
THOMSON's (Archbishop) Laws of Thought (J.) Tables of Interest.....	6	Whist, what to lead, by CAM.....	28
Conspicuous, by BREKENT.....	15	WHITTE and RIDDELL's Latin-English Dictionaries.....	7
TODD's Cyclopædia of Anatomy and Physiology.....	14	WILKESPOURCE (W.) Recollections of, by HARFORD.....	5
and BOWMAN's Anatomy and Physiology of Man.....	15	WILLIAMS's Popular Tables.....	29
TROLLOPE's Barchester Towers.....	24	WILSON's Erylogia Britannica.....	13
Warden.....	24	WINDHAM's Diary.....	4
TWISS's Law of Nations.....	27	WOOD's Homes without Hands.....	12
TYNDALL's Lectures on Heat.....	11	WOODWARD's Historical and Chronological Encyclopedia.....	3
URR's Dictionary of Arts, Manufactures, and Mines.....	17	WRIGHT's Homer's Iliad.....	25
VAN DER HORVEN's Handbook of Zoology..	12	YONGE's English-Greek Lexicon.....	8
		Abridged ditto.....	8
		YOUNG's Nautical Dictionary.....	27
		YOWATT on the Dog.....	27
		on the Horse.....	27

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